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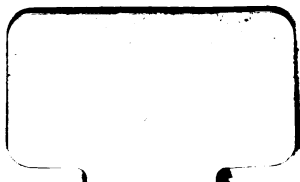


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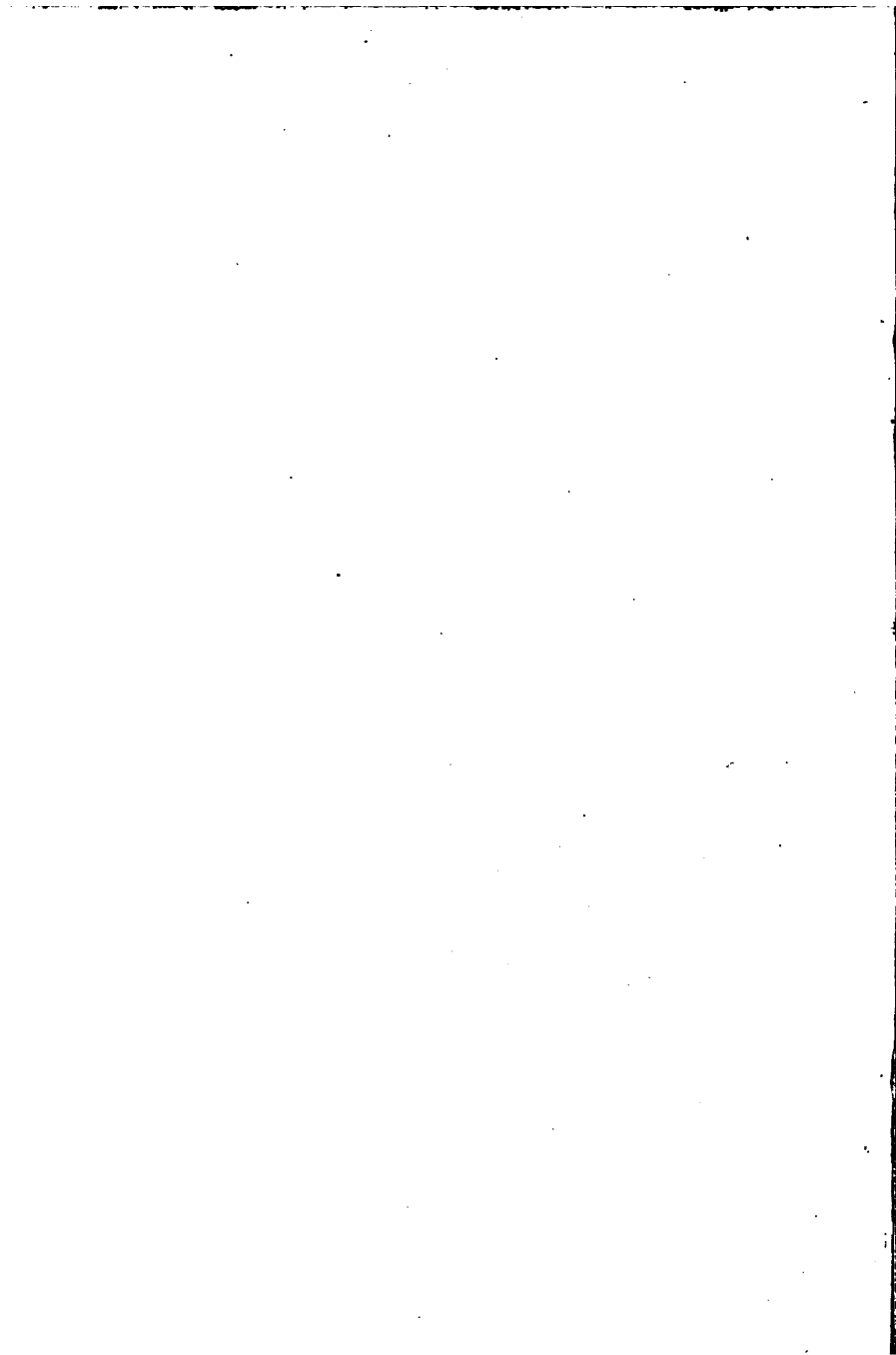
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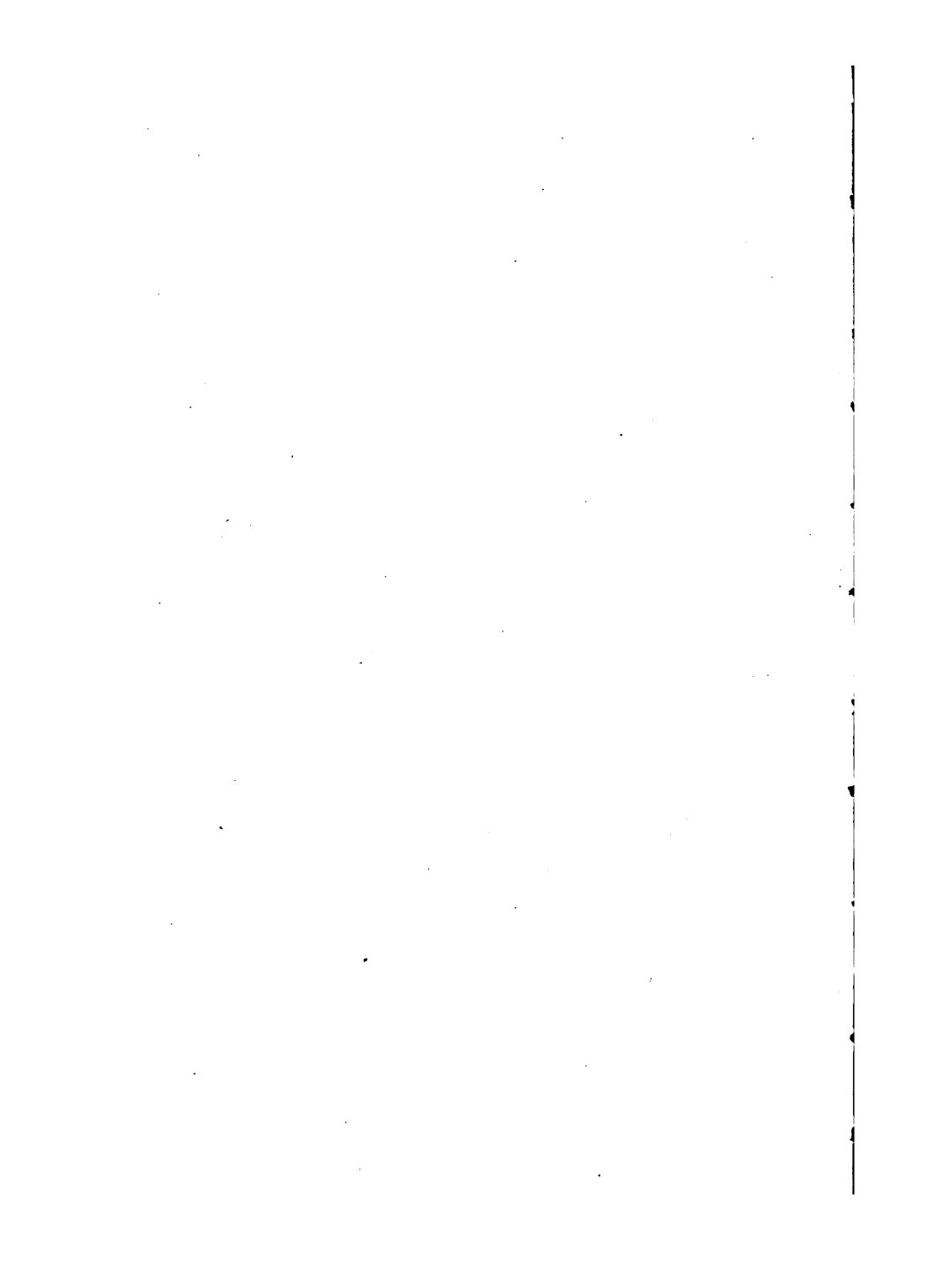


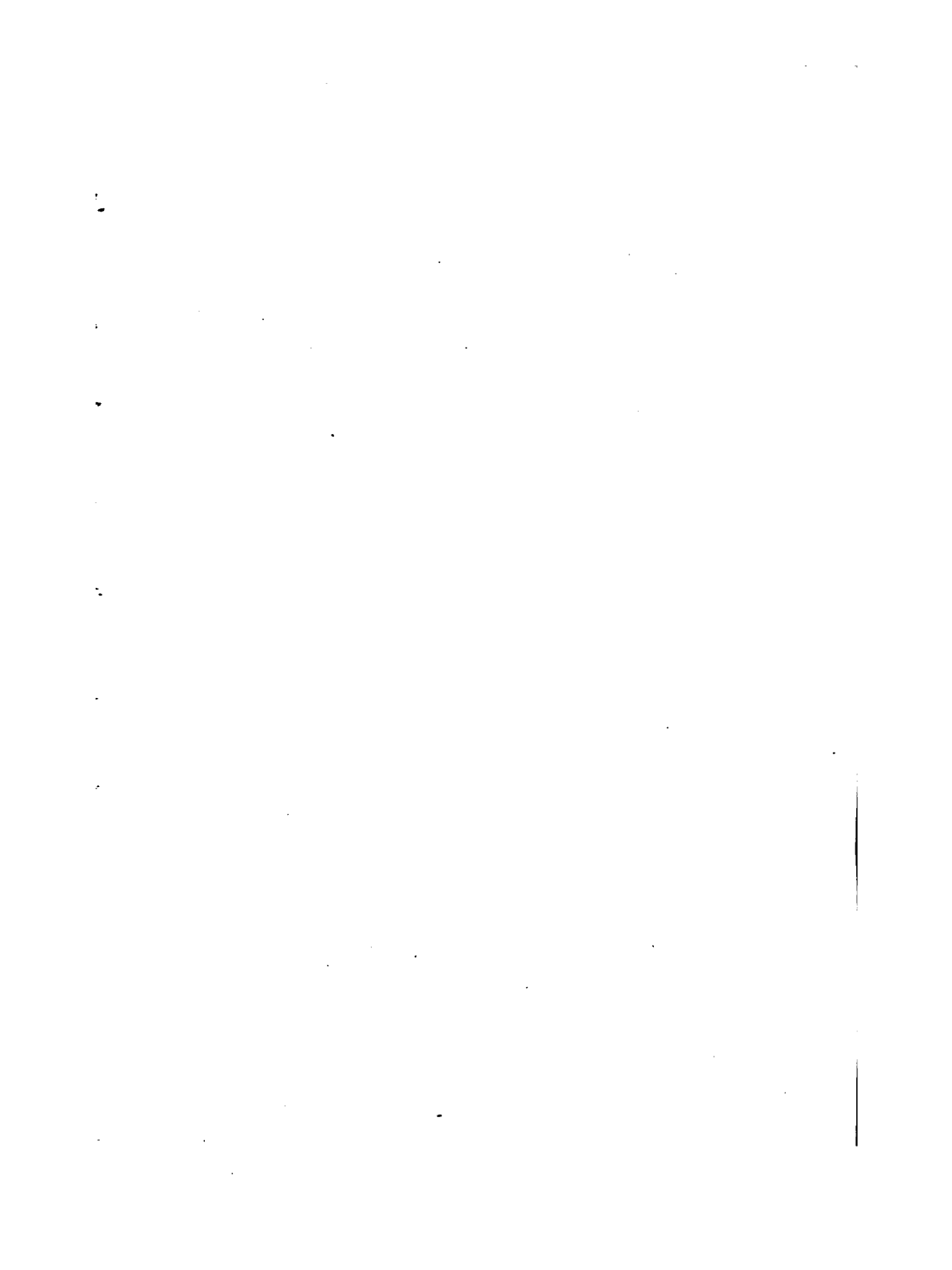


P E T

OR

Pastimes and Penalties







"She was a Pet!" p. 107.

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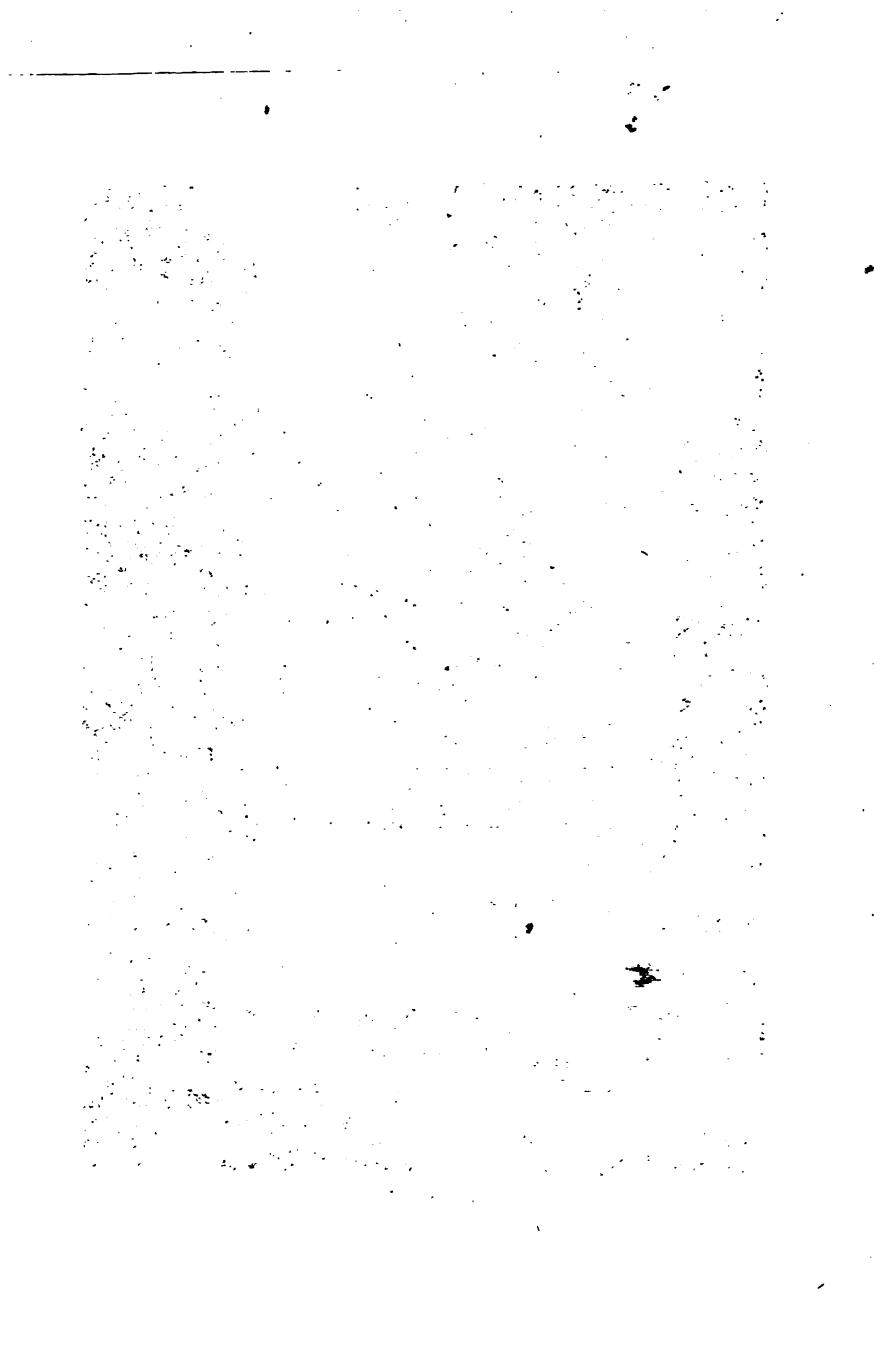
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P E T;

OR,

PASTIMES AND PENALTIES.

BY THE
REV. H. R. HAWEIS, M.A.,
AUTHOR OF "MUSIC AND MORALS."

WITH FIFTY ILLUSTRATIONS BY M. E. HAWEIS.



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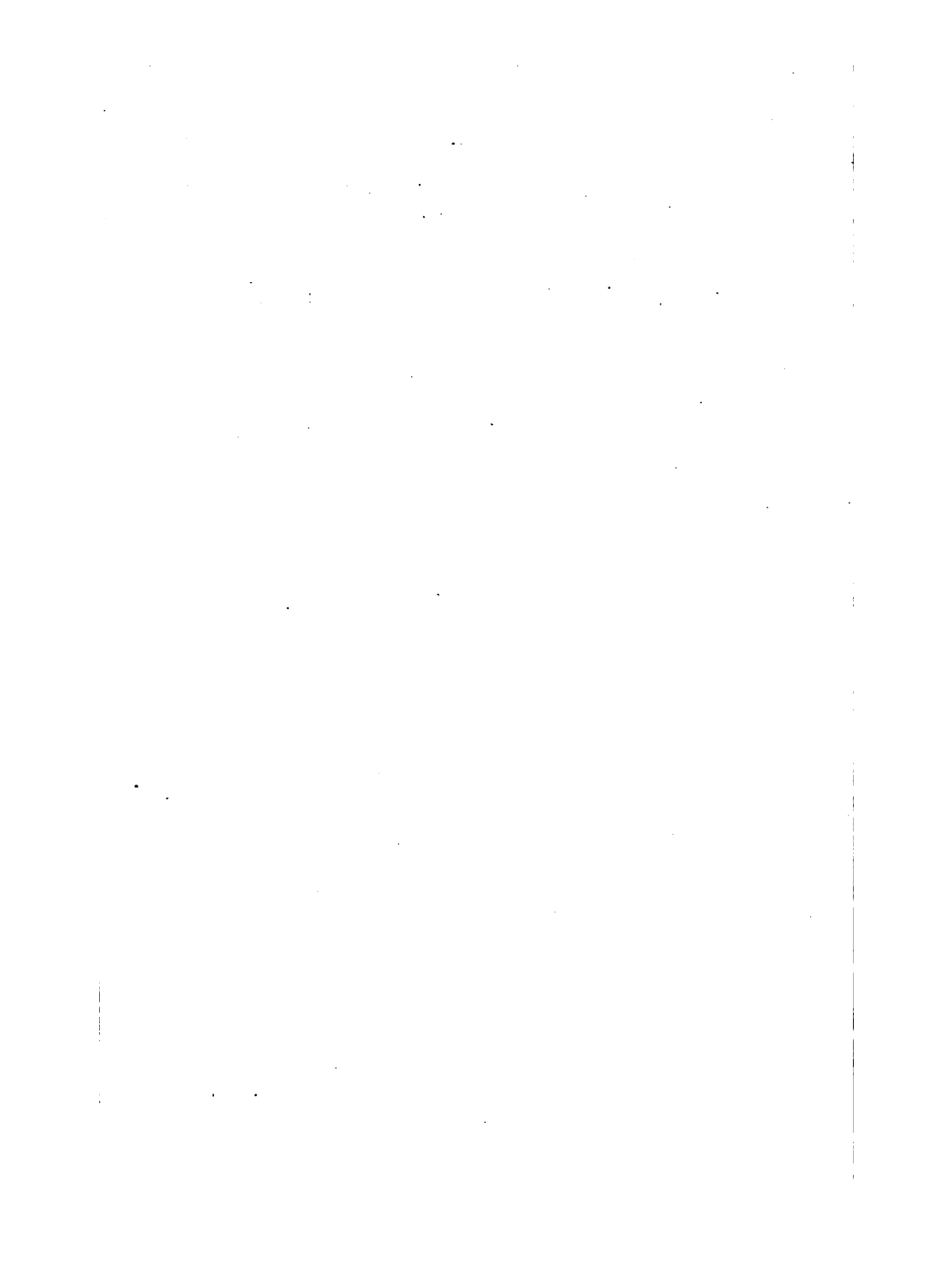
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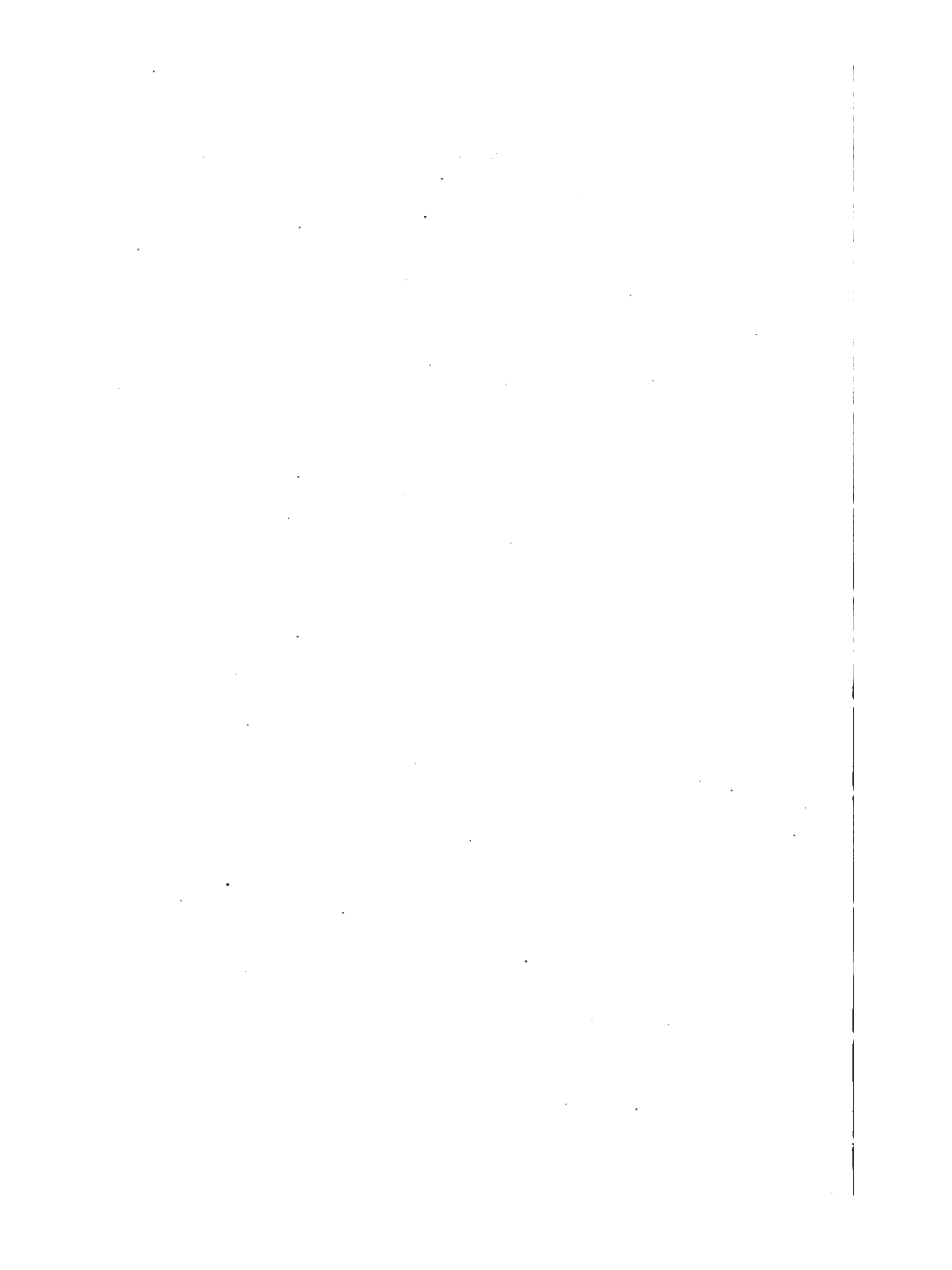
THESE PASTIMES WITHOUT THE PENALTIES



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P E T

Chapter I.

THE FEAST.



DON'T mind the rain. I never did. When I was a child I used to like water—not soap and water—but rain water. We used to make “feasts” when it rained—a whole afternoon of nothing but “feasts!” Some children lived over the way—a little red-haired girl and a thoughtful boy. On

a wet day they always used to be looking out of the window. If I could get the nursery window open, I used to put my head out and shout wildly to them.

“What are you after, Master Ben?” cries nurse.

“Let me alone, you old stoopid—let me alone!”

And as she pulls me down from the nursery bars, I make desperate efforts to get my head through again, and shout wildly to the little red-haired girl:

“Pet! Pet!” (that was what we used to call her) “come along!—hi!”

Whereupon she would make signs and disappear.

My sister Mab was older and craftier than I was. She used to use me for her own purposes. She always made out that she was of much more importance than she really was in the house, and had all sorts of influence with nurse and Mama, which, of course, I did not pretend to possess. She used to say, for instance,

“ Ben, I am going out in the garden, and I will ask Mama to let you pick some blackberries.”

Of course I was delighted, but when she came in and I asked about the blackberries, she would say,

“ I think Mama is quite right, you know how ill you were after eating such a quantity last week. You must not have any blackberries to-day !”

I found her out once or twice. She had never asked at all! But I used to notice after volunteering to use her assumed influence with nurse or Mama, she would generally make me do something for her. When she came in she would say,

“ Ben, I have lost my doll for two days. I wish you would hunt. Do go over to Pet and make her give it up. I’m sure she’s got it.” Or, “ Ben, go and tell nurse you want a cup of milk, and then you can give me some. I’m so thirsty.”

I say I often found her out, but I was her dupe ; and although I saw through her, I can’t think why I continued to be imposed upon. Well, I sometimes made use of her, too.

“Mab, let’s have a feast, ask Mama for the doll’s china and some raisins, and some salt, and some biscuits, and some jam, you know—just a little—not marmalade (we always got put off with marmalade, it made me so angry, but I did not dare to say anything for fear of losing all), and nurse has got some milk, and Pet understands, for I have seen her at the window and held up a bit of bread and she nodded, and I think she would come over with Rob (that was the thoughtful boy) if Mama could be got to send Thomas with ‘her compliments,’ and ‘Master Ben and Miss Mabel would be glad to have Pet and Rob to spend the afternoon with them,’ and then, you know, that will be an excuse to have a feast; but *you* must ask.”

We generally got the feast when we asked, but on some occasions Mama was more stingy than on others. She even said sometimes,

“You know you can *fancy* this and *fancy* that; if the plates and dishes are empty, you can *fancy* there’s cake and there’s jam, and all sorts of nice things if you set them out properly.”

I have actually sat down to a meal of this unsatisfactory nature more than once, but it was too bad! We did try and try to believe in the soup which ought to have been made of brown sugar, squeezed raisins, and tepid water; we even got a little cold water, and ladled it out, but we soon gave it up. Then Mama got us some painted wooden dishes, with roast fowls stuck on them, and painted too, and tiny piles of green apples for dessert, and oranges, which we soon split off, and found to be made of plaster. We used to sit down to it at first—concealing our feelings—but it became more and more impossible to suppress our disgust at this tawdry, sham, cheat of a dinner service. I cannot, after the lapse of years, think of it without loathing and disgust. At last it was never taken out at all. I used to lend it magnanimously to Pet, but she confided to me that she could not bear it; it came back—it gradually disappeared. I dropped it bit by bit into the fire when nurse's back was turned—gradually, of course—about one bit a week. The roast fowls went first; they were so life-like I

hated them more than the apples that only looked like hard green peas. No one but Pet knew what had become of this wooden feast; but



when the dishes were all burnt, I abstracted the wooden plates and kept them in the tool-house to make ducks and drakes with on our pond, and, to my great joy, nurse at last used the wretched box for firewood. She used to use my fiddles and Mabel's worn-out dolls for the same purpose.

When we were alone—Mabel and I—Mama was usually stingy. We used to have to save up bits of toast and a little brown sugar, and get the bits of butter out of the holes into which nurse had scraped them in buttering and scraping our slices at breakfast, and these messes were put away in an

old cracked drum, and kept till the afternoon. Mama would sometimes hardly give us anything. Under these depressing circumstances the feasts were poor things. But sometimes after a party we used to get some sumptuous scrapings, and days before the event, Pet and Rob and several other children used to be invited to the "early feast," as we used to call it. But generally when it rained, Mama used to come out with something extra, and we used to have in our neighbours opposite. We used to think when we saw the plums and candied peel coming out of the store-room cupboard, "Ah, Mama's ashamed not to give us good things when Pet and Rob come, for fear they should tell their family that she is stingy, and must be much poorer than they are." And I am afraid we used to extol far beyond their merits the wealth and splendour of rival feasts which occasionally went on over the way; we thought, not unnaturally, that Mama's liberality would be stimulated by such recitals, and I am not at all sure it wasn't. When we feasted at home, the great object was to get out of our Mama,

in addition to the usual treat, all the delicacies that we had sometimes got over the way ; and when we feasted there, the same kind of extortion was practised by Pet upon her mother : thus the rival feasts kept continually growing in magnificence until, as I shall have to narrate, they were summarily put a stop to.

Down came the rain !

“ Mab, we must have a feast. Nurse, go and tell Mama we want a feast.”



Nurse hated the feast. She used to have to wash up afterwards.

“Nonsense, Master Ben! It will clear up presently, and then you and Miss Mabel will have to come out for a walk with me.”

The very thought of it clearing up drove me to despair. Just now Pet reappeared at the window ; she was in her petticoat.

“I am sure she is coming—she is putting on a good frock !” I cried, turning to Mab.

Mab was only making a great favour of asking. I knew she would go with a little more begging. I knew her weak place too—she loved gain. She never would do anything without a reward if she could help it. So I said,

“Look here, Mab, I’ll get a young kitten from cook for you to play with, if you will get Mama to give us some things for a feast, and ask over Pet and Rob.”

“Are there any kittens?” she said suspiciously, pricking up her ears for the first time, for she had looked very unconcerned about the feast up till then; but that was her way.

“I don’t believe there are any kittens; if there were, I could ask cook for one myself,” she added with a toss of her head, as much as to say, “Don’t suppose that I am to be bribed;” but I knew she was, and I also knew cook did not like her, and would not oblige her, and she did like me, and would lend me a kitten if I asked for it; but I was sensible enough not to retort, and she had got up now and said in a careless sort of way,

“I suppose it is going to rain, and we may as well do something. I don't suppose Pet will be able to come over, she has got a cold, and I don't much care, for you always keep all the best things for her.”

This was true in a sort of way ; but then in the first division of the feast materials, Mabel used to claim for herself and Rob what I considered much more than her fair share. But I let this pass.

“Go down, Mab dear, and make haste !”

And down she went, and soon after there was a knock at the front door. Pet and the thoughtful boy had arrived, and were soon busy with the doll's china, and the cake and dates, and sugar and milk, and two oranges and one Brazilian nut.

“Oh ! there's a nut, is there ?” said Rob. “Suppose we don't eat it, make two holes, stir it up inside with a pin, and light it ; it will burn with a sort of blue flame !”

“Oh ! bother the blue flame,” cried Pet. “I don't like blue flames when there is anything else to be got. Why not crack the nut and divide it equally amongst us ?”

“Let’s toss up who’s to have it !” I suggested ; but Mab, who had been watching her opportunity, said rather sharply,

“Oh, Ben, I’m surprised at you, after what Mama said about tossing up the other day !”

“Well, what did she say ?” I remembered quite well, but I wanted to get a chance of setting Mab down, and so I prolonged the conversation.

“Why, she said it was shockingly vulgar, besides cheating.”

“No more cheating than you when you pretend to ask Mama about the blackberries and then never ask her at all, and make an answer up out of your own head.”

“Oh, you wicked story !” said Mab, blushing up to her ears.

“Yes, that’s what she did,” I cried in a loud voice, waxing bold, especially as I saw Pet was listening with delight and Rob was looking uncomfortable.

“She went downstairs and she —”

“There. that will do, Master Ben,” says nurse ;

“and don't mess your new velvet with that nasty milk.”

“Well, I'm sure,” says Mabel, “I think there can be no doubt about who ought to have the nut, Rob and I are the oldest, and as there is only one nut, we ought, of course, to have first choice.”

“You have first choice and last choice too,” I said, not well pleased, but I knew I should not get the nut.

“Rob, I think you had better not burn it,” said Mab, already assuming her right of possession.

“Oh! he's always burning everything,” cries Pet, “but he ought not to spoil our feast. I'm sure we sit quiet enough at his chemical lectures.”

“How can you find out what it's made of,” says Rob gravely, “if you don't burn it? Different things have got different smells!”

“Yes, and different tastes, too,” I cut in sharply. “If you want to know what it's made of, taste it.”

“Yes, taste it! — taste it!” cries Pet delightedly.

“You forget, Pet, the nut is ours.”

“Yes, but you can invite us, you know, and then we can taste it. Rob doesn’t care about it to eat, and you can’t eat it all by yourself.” This seemed convincing.

“Let’s begin and divide all the other things,” I said, taking out the soup tureen and the little tin oven, and plates and dishes. The oranges were to be divided equally—the third to be cut.

“Take a bit of the peel,” observes Rob, “squeeze it into a lighted candle, and it will make sparks.”

“All right, we can do that afterwards,” I said. The fact was that Rob was always making experiments, and I believe, although he liked nice things to eat, he did not really care about feasts. I think he despised them a little, although he would do whatever Mab told him. He never took pains with the dishes. He said he thought the simplest things were best. He did not care about the mixtures—his dish always used to be a mere bit of almond or cake, or a raisin, not so much as peeled, and with all the stones left in it. If there was jam and milk, he would ask for the jam and eat it separately, and

then drink the milk, instead of stirring them together and adding a little nutmeg with a squeeze of orange juice, and simmering the whole over a lighted lucifer match, as of course he ought to have done; at least so we thought, only we did not like to tell him so for fear of hurting his feelings. But we all felt that he only made feasts with us on condition that we should afterwards listen to one of his chemical lectures in the attic or the tool-house, and on the whole we got on pretty well, only Mab was dreadfully unfair about dividing the things; she took all the best dishes and plates, but if I could only secure the oven and the soup tureen, I was happy.

I never got my fair share of the dates and raisins—so much so that Pet used habitually to bring a few things over in a curl paper, or I could not possibly have made those extraordinary combinations which sometimes compelled the admiration even of Mab, although Rob often declined to taste them, and gave it as his opinion that “fermentation” and “spontaneous generation” would set in

before the end of the feast if I insisted upon mixing brown sugar, vinegar, and orange juice with milk. I had one receipt for everything that did not seem quite a success. I boiled it. I always made the soup, for no one was equal to me in boiling, and all soup must be boiled. On these occasions Rob used to stand and lecture at me until I could hardly conceal my impatience.

“The greater the specific gravity of the fluid, the sooner it will boil.”

“This,” I replied, “is not specific gravity, it is soup.”

“Milk,” he continued, unabashed, “will boil over sooner than water, and it will boil all away if you leave it long enough—that is to say, if it does not boil over; put the cover on tightly and it will blow up.”

He twitched his hand nervously, as though longing to illustrate this peculiarity of boiling liquid by a brilliant experiment; he evidently did not take the slightest interest in the quality of the soup.

“There, isn’t that soup done?” said Mab.

"No, it's not," said Pet eagerly, who liked nothing better than to hang about me and help the process at every stage, holding one side of the cover whilst I held the other; tearing the paper whilst I lighted the match. I believe she would have been perfectly happy if the whole feast had consisted solely in making the soup. At last it was finished.

"Let's put a little more nutmeg in," says Pet, "just to take off the taste of the vinegar."

"We're all waiting," says Mab rather sternly.

"This soup," I remarked, "is peculiar; it's got a new taste. I've thought over it for some time; it's an experiment, you know." I looked at Rob in a conciliatory manner; he looked anxious.

"It simmered!" he said.

"Yes," I replied, "it simmered."

"And it curdled!" he continued.

"Well—it curdled," I answered apologetically, "because of the milk."

"No," says he gravely, "it wasn't the milk."

"Well, look here," I added as plausibly and frankly as I could, for I felt the eyes of the com-

pany were upon me, and that my reputation was at stake, "I've tasted it—it's capital; it's new, you know, of course, and perhaps you won't like it at first, but we must have a change. Look here, just taste it. You can eat a biscuit after it if you don't like it. You saw how it was made, didn't he Pet?—he saw how it was made."

"Yes!" echoed Pet, "he saw how it was made!"

I think we were all getting rather uneasy.

"It curdled!" said Rob.

"Well, of course," I said, with great vehemence, "be-cause-of-the-milk!"

"No," he said in a deeper voice, which made me feel uncomfortable. "Not milk."

"Well, then, what?"

"Vinegar!" said he, with a ghastly expression. After this I did not dare offer him any. Mab took half a tiny spoonful and made a horrid face. I was very angry, and turned to Pet and said,

"You like it, don't you, Pet?" Poor Pet; her hour of trial was come, but she did not fail me.

"Oh! I'm sure I should like it if I was more *accustomed* to it; it's the first time, you know, Ben dear, and it's new,—you said it was new."

"Yes, but nice," I said.

"Yes, nice, of course," she said, and sipped, rather warily I noticed, a small portion of it. I felt that I must support her, so I swallowed several spoonfuls. There was a taste about it.

"I wish," I said cheerfully, "I wish I had put more nutmeg in now; it would have improved it, perhaps."

"Oh!" says Mab sneeringly, "you think it might be improved; you don't mean to say so!"

"You've no right to speak; you won't eat it," I said, gulping away. "Have some more, Pet?"

"I haven't quite done."

"I wouldn't have begun," said Rob gravely, "if I was you; it's bad enough mixed as it is, but it mixes worse after you've swallowed it."

"Oh! it's all right after it's swallowed," says Pet, sipping slower and slower.

"Yes," rejoined Mabel, evidently glad to steal

an arrow from the enemy's quiver, "the swallowing is the worst part."

"I'm not sure of that," said the thoughtful boy; and he added mysteriously, "there's bad and there's worse, and after that comes worst!" And Mabel nodded with triumphant approval.

All this time I was eating away, and getting to feel rather queer myself, so I turned to Pet.

"You know this is only the soup, and we must not eat too much; I mean more than we should have eaten if the others had had their share.

"I wish," said Pet earnestly, "the others would have their share."

"Well, you shall have the soup all to yourselves," said Mabel in one of those decided tones of voice which I disliked so much, and which meant that we were to be forced to obey, as if it was all settled and we had agreed to it, when in fact we had not even been asked. "You shall have our share of the soup, and we will have your share of the jam."

"I like jam," said Pet, as the tears almost came

into her eyes, and she pushed away her unfinished soup impatiently.

“I’ll give you half mine,” said Rob good-naturedly.

“I don’t see that’s fair,” said Mabel sharply. “She’s had all the soup, and Ben gives her nearly all his share of everything. I don’t see why you should give her everything too; it makes it all uneven.”

“Well, I don’t care,” said Rob, evidently afraid of Mabel, who never could bear any notice taken of Pet, especially by Rob. “I don’t care, let’s have the next dish. Oh! you’ve got lump sugar; well, look here. Suppose it’s night, you know, and you blow out the candle—then you’re in the dark—and you take two bits of lump sugar and rub them together, and that will make blue sparks; these sparks will—”

“Pass the raisins,” I said in a loud voice, for I hated these lectures in the middle of our feasts; besides, we had all heard about the lumps of sugar so often.

"The raisins belong to us," said Mabel, as she swept them all over to her side.

"No; we divided them the other way; didn't we, Ben? Mabel herself left us three when she took six, though what she wants with six and all the jam I don't know. I think it's selfish."

"Selfish, indeed!" said Mabel in a dignified manner. "Well, I'm sure, when I am at *your* house, *I* don't complain."

"Because you always get it all your own way, and I never get anything except what Ben gives me, and then he goes without; and, of course, he doesn't like that much himself."

"Oh! I don't mind, Pet; what will you have? Let's leave those two alone. You sit by me, and you shall have my share." And although Pet had some scruples, she soon forgot her grievance, and began peeling a few raisins which we succeeded in rescuing.

"Don't you want them, Ben?"

"No; the fact is I have not got much appetite."

Then she said, after eating a raisin with some milk and brown sugar,

“Ben, I don’t think I want any any more.”

Meanwhile our feast had split up, and Mabel and Rob had gone off to a little side-table with all the best things.

“You must mix the orange juice with white sugar, and then make the pulp into a little mound, like a mould by itself, and lay bits of almond round it; sprinkle bread crumbs over the whole, and then pour the orange juice over the top of it; that’s the sauce.” We heard Mabel giving these and similar directions, and trying to excite the thoughtful boy to partake of various mixtures.

“Look here,” he would say, “I’ll have the almond plain. Do you know they can get oil out of almonds? Bruise it, and you see it will get quite moist; well, that’s the oil. And you can burn it; would you like to try? Well, you can eat it afterwards, only it’s an experiment as well; you can do it with a lucifer match. Burnt almonds aren’t bad, you know.”

“I say, Ben, I wish it would leave off raining, and then you could take me down to the pond. I’m tired of the feast, aren’t you?”

We both got up.

“Where are you going?” said Mabel sharply.
“Why don’t you go on with the feast?”

“You’ve got all the best things,” I said. “We are tired of it, we’ve had enough.”

“You’re tired of the soup, I suppose. I never saw such waste; it’s a shame to waste all that milk and orange juice. Mama will never give you any more if she finds you waste it.”

Somehow or other it wasn’t a pleasant feast. I think we got on better when there were more children, or when I got Pet all alone; we weren’t so watched and bothered then.

I saw Mabel was determined to make me and Pet eat all the soup; indeed, there wasn’t much else for us. I didn’t like being ordered about; but I still less liked to admit that the soup on further acquaintance was a failure; in short, absolutely sick-

ening. Pet had been very good, and eaten as much as she could, then she confided to me in a whisper,

“ Ben dear, I can’t eat any more ; I feel sick.”

I started. She had expressed just my own feeling ; we were companions in misfortune. She nestled close to me ; I pressed her arm affectionately.

“ You’ll be all right presently, dear. Don’t let *them* know.”

“ We’ve nearly done the feast,” cried Mabel from the other end of the room. “ You had better finish up the soup at once.”

I took the little soup tureen with both hands. Pet heaved a sigh as she saw me do it. I knew she understood my feelings, and it nerved me for the last heroic effort. With one gulp I poured the whole contents down my throat. I need not describe my sensations. I kept up pretty well until Rob and Pet were fetched. Pet was unusually quiet during the rest of the afternoon ; she did not care to play or move about much ; she sat in a corner and looked over pictures, but I could see she was not really attending to the pic-

tures. I knew what was the matter with her ; she wasn't as bad as I was ; but she had had too much soup. It was another link between us ; I was awfully fond of her ; and although just then my own feelings engrossed me, afterwards for days and days when I remembered how nobly she had taken her soup for my sake, I thought there was no sacrifice that I would not make for her.

That night, instead of going off to sleep like a top, I lay awake for several hours thinking of the soup and Pet, and feeling very uncomfortable. I wished she had been sleeping in the next bed instead of Mabel, because I could have talked to her. I didn't dare say a word to Mabel, she had been very snappish all tea-time, but she was asleep now. I could hear her breathing hard, but she was fast asleep ; she hadn't had the soup, at least not enough to make her ill. At last I got into a kind of sleep, but such a dreadful sleep. I dreamt it was daylight,—I was lying by the window,—it was wide open, and close to me on the window sill

sat two immense black ravens with long beaks; they were looking at me. I seemed to see all this although my eyes were shut, and I knew that if I moved or opened them, the ravens would peck my eyes out.

It was horrible! I could not stir, I dared not rise; at last the agony got so great, I woke up with a scream in a cold perspiration; at that moment I thought the ravens both flew at me, but all was quite dark. I had a dreadful pain in my stomach. I never passed such a miserable night.

Next morning I was pale and could not touch my breakfast. Mama came in. The doctor was sent for.

“Put out your tongue,” says he. “Ah! master Harry, you been have eating something unwholesome.”

“It’s them nasty feasts,” says nurse; “they’ll poison themselves some day. I really think, Mum, you’d better stop them feasts.”

I was ordered physic and kept upstairs in the nursery; in the afternoon I saw Pet at the window,

with a red dressing-gown on, looking very pale. I was rather glad she was ill too; I only wished she could have come over. It was rather jolly being ill now the worst was over; and the doctor said I should be all right and sleep very well, if I minded what he said and took my physic; and so it happened, but there was an end of our feasts.

For two days neither Pet nor I were allowed to go out of the house.

“It was the soup, Mama,” said Mabel; “some nasty horrid stuff he made, and *I* wouldn’t eat it,” And so if ever we asked Mama for a feast, she used to say with a very unpleasant smile, “Ben, remember the soup!”





Chapter III.

THE CHEMICAL LECTURE.



SAY, Rob, has *your* Ma stopped the feasts?" said I.

"The feasts?" says Rob, as he looked up from the difficult operation of blowing a hen's egg. "You know, the feasts were never what *I* call scientific."

"Well, I don't know about that, but what are we to do? We can't all four play at

battledore and shuttlecock, and the racing game's awfully slow and—”

“Look here,” said Rob, laying down the egg with a very grave and persuasive nod, “I’ll give a regular large chemical lecture, with lots of experiments; smoke, you know, and explosions and flames.”

“And smells,” I said, holding my nose.

“Well, you can go out if you don’t like the smell. You *must* have *some* smells, you can’t have any science without smells; all the best experiments smell.”

“Very well, what are you going to do?”

“I’ll make gas in a tobacco-pipe; I will burn stuff under water. I will make a great flame in the air with powdered resin, and I will blow up all sorts of things.”

It sounded well, but then I had often listened to wonderful promises of this sort, and the lecture itself never half came up to the descriptions, so I said cautiously,

“Have you got anything new?”

"I ain't going to tell you all I've got," said Rob, evidently wounded, but waxing warm. "I tell you, I'll give a large lecture with lots of things worth seeing, and I'll have it over here, up in our attic, and invite ever so many besides you and Mabel; you ain't enough."

"Oh! very well, we'll stay away then."

"Well, stay away then. I know Mabel will come."

As I didn't want to quarrel with Rob, especially on account of Pet, I settled to be one of the party; and, in order to give the lecturer plenty of time to prepare, the performance was fixed for next week. Mabel and I went round to ask the Robinson boys that lived at the Grange, and had just come home for the holidays. On our way there we met the two Marsden girls, Amy and Sophia, and we asked them, whilst Rob's mamma sent out invitations to a large family, the Douglasses, and Pet went round with the nurse to invite two Martin boys and three Martin girls, who asked if they might bring some cousins, and before

the next day a party of about twenty had agreed to meet at Mrs. Ainslie's (that was the name of Pet's mamma), have tea at six o'clock, and after tea undergo a chemical lecture by the thoughtful boy.

"If it's dull, you know," I said, "or (seeing Rob's indignant look at the very idea) don't last long enough or anything of that sort, you know, we can fill out the time with games—hunt the slipper or blind-man's buff."

"Oh! yes," cried Pet dancing with delight. "I hope it will be dull;" (then checking herself on catching sight of Rob's face), "I mean I hope there'll be time for the games, you know;" she continued in a soothing way, "some might like the games better than the lecture."

"And some might like the lecture better than the games," said the thoughtful boy rather drily.

"Yes; that's just what she means," I cut in. "Tastes differ, you know."

"Especially with regard to soup," says Rob, and with that home thrust he turned and left us.

The evening arrived, and the two Robinson boys between ten and twelve, and the three Martin girls from six to ten, and their two brothers, eleven and thirteen, and Amy and Sophia Marsden, eleven and fifteen, and four Douglasses from seven to fourteen; and their two cousins, nice little girls, with long hair hanging down behind; and there was a large twelfth-cake with crackers all round it, and jam and biscuits, and sweetmeats and cream; and I sat next Pet and poured cream into her tea on the sly, and she slipped two crackers into my lap to rescue them, for Mabel appeared to be busy collecting as many crackers as she could without letting them off, which we thought a shame.

“Why don’t you let them off,” I cried, “and then we should have some fun? I dare say you’ve put some into your pockets.”

I forgot the two crackers which I had just tucked into my own; but Mabel was sharper, and said in a dignified manner,

“Have you got more than two in your own pocket?”

“Pet gave me two,” I cried, “and I’ve got them and I’m going to let them off; but she,” I continued, pointing to Mabel, and looking round the table, for every one was now listening to the dispute about the crackers, “she takes home lots of things and lays them up on a shelf, and there the crackers get damp and won’t go off, and she never shares anything with anybody, and then she finds fault with me and—”

Here Pet pulled my sleeve violently, for Mrs. Ainslie had just entered the room and said, “My dear children, I hope none of you are quarrelling; have you got all you like? I hope you’re enjoying yourselves.”

Every one was immediately silent, all except a suppressed murmur of respectful assent, which sounded like a great many “Yes, thank you’s” muttered very shyly; and in the temporary hush Mabel ostentatiously offered to pull a cracker with Rob, who she knew would say, “Thanks; don’t waste it on me, I don’t care about it so much.” Then she turned to the youngest little

Martin girl, a pale timid little thing, who would be certain to say, "Thank you, no; I'm too frightened." And then she (I knew she would, but I did not dare make another commotion),—then she quietly slipped it into her pocket.

I think on the whole we all liked the tea very much; the two Martin boys had at least four cups of tea each, and several large pieces of gingerbread, besides buns, bread and butter, a slice of cake, and the contents of six crackers, all of which they ate themselves. They were not very polite to the little girls who sat next them, they kept pulling their hair instead of offering them cake; sometimes they trod on their toes and looked quite grave, upon which the little girls burst out laughing, and nearly spilled their tea. Amy and Sophia Marsden, aged eleven and fifteen, were considered the beauties. Amy had a quantity of light silken hair, and was very fair. Sophia was the eldest, tall and dark, and I noticed she was particularly sedate and polite, and had on a much longer gown than usual; but Amy was full of fun, and even

once threw a sugar plum at one of the Martin boys, who had winked at her in a very comical manner (he was considered a wit, and was not in the least shy or abashed before any one). I noticed that Sophia was rather shocked, and looked quite solemn at these familiarities. I confess this surprised me, as only a few months before in our play-room I went down on all fours, and she rode on my back and whacked me so hard with a stick that I kicked like an obstinate donkey and tumbled her right off, amidst roars of laughter, in which she joined as heartily as any one.

I think we spun out the tea as long as possible; Rob, the lecturer of the evening, was silent, restless and evidently preoccupied. He did not take much tea, and soon disappeared, to prepare for the grand chemical lecture, I suppose.

The attic at the top of the house was a large spacious but somewhat low room, devoted to Rob's various mechanical and scientific pursuits. There was a collection of bird's eggs on one shelf; there was a rat's skin waiting to be stuffed, and a bird

just stuffed and tied up with fine string; there was a whole shelf of messes which Rob called his "solutions"; two or three bottles with chestnuts in water supposed to be growing; a lathe and carpenter's bench, tools, shavings, etc., all of which were shoved on one side, whilst the whole room was arranged for company when we entered. There was a table with a shaded lamp which threw light upon it, leaving the room in shadow; rows of chairs were ranged in front of the table for the audience, and behind the table stood Rob, with his sleeves turned up, looking very grave and important, and evidently quite in his element as he surveyed first the brilliant assembly in front of him, and then the array of bottles, saucers, and chemicals upon which he proposed shortly to operate.

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN," began the lecturer; here the Martin boys, who certainly had had too much tea, began to applaud violently—and I am sorry to say I joined in,—one of the Martin boys took the opportunity to tickle Amy Marsden, who, of course, burst out laughing, which set off the

others, and I firmly believe that Mabel and Sophia Marsden were the only two in the room who retained their composure; as for Pet, she was delighted—she evidently thought the lecture could not last long if this was to be the conduct of the listeners. But the lecturer only looked up rather surprised, and arranged some of his bottles; and when quiet had been restored, he continued,

“The title of the lecture is ‘EARTH, FIRE, AND WATER.’”

“How about air?” asked Tom Robinson.

“Hush!” said Mabel, who was all attention.

“Air,” replied Rob courteously, “requires retorts and pumps, and those sort of things. I can give another lecture on air, but air will come in to-night; because fire wants air and so does steam, which is water in one shape.”

“Hear! hear!” said one of the Douglass boys, whose father was in Parliament, and Rob continued,

“I’ll begin with

WATER.

I have here a jug of boiling water; I have coloured

it bright blue" (and he poured out a little in a glass, and held it up between the light for us to see). "This is a water bottle full of cold water. I pour the cold water into a tumbler; now if I pour the blue boiling water into the cold, you might suppose it would mix; but it won't" (and he gently poured some of the blue hot water into a tumblerful of the cold). "You see now the blue lies on the surface; that shows the hot won't mix at once with the cold, because when hot it is lighter than when cold; if it was heavier it would sink."

"Try it, old chap," I said, "try it."

"I'm going to," continued Rob, evidently cheered by the favourable impression made by the success of the first experiment. "Now, here is clear boiling water in a tumbler, and here is cold milk; as I pour it in the milk sinks to the bottom, because it is heavier than the hot water; in each case the hot water lies at the top because it is lighter than the liquid underneath."

These were greeted with applause, which was redoubled when the lecturer announced,

“The next experiment will be an explosion.”

Rob then produced an ordinary brown stone ginger-beer bottle, and taking up the jug of boiling water, he continued, “I fill this half full of hot water and cork it down tightly. You know that a teaspoonful of water boiled into steam fills ever so many times the space that the water did before it became steam ; if you imprison the water in a boiler, and boil it, the steam will begin to press against the sides of the boiler and try to get out ; if you make a hole in the boiler it will rush out violently, as you can see it any day come out of the spout of a kettle ; if there is no hole in the boiler, but a weak place anywhere, it will drive it out and blow a hole in the boiler. I will show this by an experiment. This ginger-beer bottle is my boiler, the cork is my weak place. I will put this bottle over a spirit-lamp till enough water has been boiled to steam, and then what will be the result ?”

“Pop!” suggested the lively Tom Robinson, making a loud crack by inflating his cheeks, and

punching them simultaneously with both his fists.

By this time the attention of the room was really riveted upon the ginger-beer bottle which stood being boiled up over the spirit lamp. The little girls began to stop their ears, and the whole assembly held their breath in suspense; the lecturer stood calm and triumphant with folded arms, and merely remarked,

“If it don’t burst the bottle, it will blow the cork out; and if it don’t blow the cork out, it will burst the bottle.”



Pop!

At that moment the cork flew out with a tremendous bang, hitting the ceiling and falling amongst the excited audience, many of whom screamed, whilst the boys did their utmost to increase the uproar.

When the noise had a little subsided, the lecturer said, in a sentence which he had evidently

learned by heart, but which he delivered with much dignity, "I have shown you, ladies and gentlemen, some of the curious properties of water, and the tremendous power of steam. Water composes three quarters of the surface of the globe, and the steam-engine is considered the wonder of the world."

"How about the electric telegraph?" suggested one of the Douglass boys, whose father was connected in some way with the Transatlantic cable; but he was drowned by the applause which followed the lecturer's last sentence, whilst this scientific man had already retired behind a screen to prepare the first experiment of the second part of his lecture, entitled

EARTH.

When Rob reappeared we noticed that he held two tumblers of white powder, one in each hand.

"He's going to have a draught!" said the incorrigible Tom in a loud, hoarse whisper; and then shouting at the top of his voice, "Make it fizz, old fellow, and hand it round!"

Every one burst out laughing.

"It's nothing to drink," said Rob quite unruffled. "Water was the first part of the lecture. The earth—"

"Is round," suggested a Martin boy.

"No, it isn't!" replied Rob, this time sharply; "you ought to know better than that; the earth is flattened at the poles like an orange. That's nothing to do with the lecture. These two tumblers—"

"Will tumble," sighed Tom Robinson, with a loud groan.

"Oh! do be quiet," said Mabel.

"I say, I have taken these two powders—"

"Poor fellow!" ejaculated Tom, rubbing his sides with a horrid grimace suggestive of nasty physic. "Have some jam?"

The fact is that in the interim between the parts crackers had been pulled; little cakes and sugar plums exchanged; furtive pinches given, and a good deal of fun and conversation commenced, which some parties concerned did not seem willing

to drop at the call of science. Hence these frivolous interruptions, which at last began seriously to discompose the young lecturer, who still stood with his two tumblers of white powder before his juvenile audience without being allowed to explain the nature of his next experiment.

“Look here,” he said at last in a tone of annoyance, tempered with a certain good sense and politeness, “if you fellows don’t want to hear the lecture you can go away; you needn’t prevent the girls from seeing the experiment.”

“Experiment! Experiment!” cried the boys.

“All right; but I must explain. The earth,” he began again “is composed of different substances, animal, vegetable, and mineral; you can collect these substances, and put them together in all sorts of different ways, and then you have different experiments; things put together are different from things separate. Now in this tumbler I have carbonate of potass and in this I have chloride of ammonium. Try these two powders, they have no smell at all.”

This invitation was responded to by a rush of the boys, who immediately surrounded the table, and began taking pinches of the white powder, like snuff.

"You should take it to the girls," says Rob, "and ask them to smell both the powders."

"How can you smell what don't smell?"

"That's just it," says Rob; "you can't. Now go back and let me get on with the lecture." Order being restored, the lecturer threw the contents of the tumblers into a small mortar, and began to pound them up together with a pestle.

"Now," he exclaimed, "one of you fellows hand the mortar round and ask the girls to smell it." Tom Robinson plunged his nose in first.

"It's a swindle," he says. "I can't smell much."

"It's salts, smelling salts," said Rob helpfully.

"It isn't nearly as strong as a smelling bottle," said a Martin boy. "Sophia Marsden's got a smelling bottle. I say, Sophia, lend us your bottle. Well, I declare; that's strong if you like!" he jerked his head back as he put the bottle to his nose.

The scientific mixture was handed round, but the smelling bottle was voted much the strongest, and so Rob's experiment despite of its scientific nature was voted a failure, and he haughtily declined to explain it any further, merely remarking,

“You fellows are led by your noses, and are trying to set the girls against the lecture.”

“All right, old chap, cut on,” was all the encouragement he got; so poor Rob “cut on” as follows :

“I will now introduce an experiment showing the extraordinary power of some materials to increase in bulk under heat by absorbing oxygen from the air.” He then placed six little white cones, about the size of conical bullets, in a row at some distance from each other, under a long glass case with a pipe fixed to a hole at the top to carry off the poisonous vapour up the chimney. He then set light to each of the cones, and invited the audience to come up closely and inspect what he called “a truly remarkable phenomenon.” The Douglass boys had seen it before, they said, and were loud in depreciation; their father had got this,

that, and the other. Pharaoh's serpents that reached across the room, flying serpents, fiery serpents—all sorts of serpents; but the children crowded round the table, and clapped their hands and wondered to see the sudden coils rise and rise and rise, and twist and twirl and fall about, and wind into reptile knots, for all the world like living reptiles;



the whole inside of the glass case in a long line seemed to be crawling as the serpents expanded and fell, and collapsed in their apparent efforts to reach each other; even the Martin and Robinson boys shouted

“Bravo! bravo! old chap, you’ve done it this time. Snakes is snakes.”

When the vapour had passed off and the snakes were complete, Rob removed the glass shade.

“He’ll bite you!” cried Harry Martin, pushing

Amy Marsden towards the longest serpent. Amy screamed, and Harry's timid little sister was so frightened that she had to be carried out of the room in a flood of tears. Several of the girls indeed were quite alarmed, but my Pet, she was never afraid of anything. She took up one of the serpents; it was as light as a feather, and crumbled to dust in her fingers. But Rob, whilst enjoying the excitement created by this last experiment, was evidently afraid that the scientific interest would flag and turn into mere fun and amusement. He perceived that much more explanation or lecturing would not be tolerated, and that his hearers would only be kept steady by plenty of experiments, but he was anxious to get them away from the table; the boys began to pull his bottles and things about, and the girls were laughing and beginning to romp with the boys, and throw the powdery remains of the snakes at each other.

Now, behind the row of serpents was a row of little bowls full of water. "Now," cried Rob, shaking some powder which he called phosphuret

of lime into each bowl. "This stuff burns under water; it sinks down to the bottom—rises in bubbles to the surface—bursts, burns—and (in a stentorian voice),—smells!"

And it did smell; the brown smoke went up from the little bubbles in the six bowls, and the children fled away holding their noses. Sophia's smelling bottle, and even the despised salts in the mortar, were soon in great request, but the smell was intolerable. The servants, who had crowded at the entrance of the attic to look on, now fled in dismay; the poor children huddled together, carrying their noses in handkerchiefs, and some made for the door, and still the flames ascended from the six dreadful bowls. It was a ghastly sight! The *débris* of huge snaky reptiles in front, horrible brown vapours rising behind them, the candles flickering dimly in the poisonous mist, and behind it Rob standing pale and grim, like one breathing his native atmosphere, alone, unmoved, surveying placidly the scene of horror and confusion created by this last awfully scientific experiment.

At last the poor children could bear it no longer, they rushed in a body to the door; there they were met by Mrs. Ainslie, who had hastened up in great alarm.

“Good gracious me, children, what is the matter; Rob! Rob! what an awful smell. Put it out—put it out immediately and open all the windows.”

“You can’t put it out,” said the philosopher calmly, like one who understood and exulted in the fixed laws of nature, “it will burn out; I won’t put any more in. I told them it would smell; all the best experiments smell, you know,” he said gloatingly. It was evident that he did not in the least sympathise with the feelings of horror which this result of science had called forth. To him it was a beautiful and consoling fact that the bubbles of phosphuret of lime should burn on the surface of water, and afterwards announce their successful combustion by one of the most fearful smells known to the scientific world!

“You dreadful boy,” exclaimed Mrs. Ainslie. “How could you! Open the window—throw

all that away; you've nearly killed all the children."

In truth the room was empty, the children were crowded together in the passage, all the windows in the house were soon opened, and the quality of the atmosphere was to some extent restored.

By this time the lecturer was fairly alive to the gravity of the situation; it had dawned upon him that the sensation made by his last experiment might prove fatal to the third part of the lecture, and he grew proportionately agitated.

"Look here, Ma," he said in an unusually excited manner, "you mustn't stop the lecture; there's no more smells;" and then running to the door, he cried to the audience, who stood coughing and sneezing in the passage,

"I say, it's all right. Come in; there's nothing to smell now. Come in; all the best is to come. The last part is very short; I can do lots of it at the same time—it's splendid! Come in! Lights, you know; regular flashes, tar and rosin flames, and the magnesium light. Come in! come in!"

Mrs. Ainslie, who had certainly intended to stop the further progress of science on that night, was borne down by the ardour of the lecturer; indeed, it was difficult to resist him as he stood shouting, "Come in; come in!" and waving his arms whilst the tears rose to his eyes at the bare thought of sacrificing the splendid experiments which were to adorn the last part. Altogether he was so unlike himself, so unlike the calm and thoughtful Rob; he had risen to the occasion, his will was strong, the impetuosity of his character came out in his enthusiasm for his favourite pursuit, *even* the children that had just now fled in horror were startled into obedience, and seemed compelled almost against their will to come in and hear the lecture out.

Rob felt it was a sublime moment in his life as he advanced once more to the table, flushed with excitement, and beheld before him the little group, serious and attentive enough now; he had bound them at last with the spell of his own earnestness, and not even Tom Robinson dared to hazard a joke

as Rob, with a grand wave of his hand, announced

FIRE!

as the subject of the third and last part of the chemical lecture.

“I am now going to show the way in which powdered substances which burn easily become suddenly a flash of fire in the air; the powder floats in the air like a cloud of dust, a spark falls into it, and the whole instantly inflames.”

Rob then blew out all the candles except one slender taper, which stood burning raised on a high box before him; he held a sheet of paper in his hand containing a quantity of white rosin smashed to a fine powder.

“Rosin,” he remarked, “is a kind of gum, splendid for burning; it burns (“like blazes!” said a well-known voice) with tremendous fury. If I had enough of it here, I could easily burn this house down (sensation amongst the girls). It is also used for rosining violin bows; it is sticky, and makes the bow scrape the strings better.” (“Hang up the fiddle and the bow-o-o,” a chorus

which was taken up by all the boys, until suddenly the lecturer, perceiving that the time for theories was past, and the time for action had arrived, let fly the whole of the white powder into the flame of the candle). A scream, half of delight, half of terror, rose from the audience as a vast sheet of flame, which reached nearly to the ceiling, burst forth, and as suddenly went out. "Encore! encore!" shouted the boys, this time highly delighted, "go it again, old fellow!" The judicious Rob had foreseen the success of this experiment, and discharged a still larger bag of powder into the candle, which seemed to the dazzled eyes of the children to wrap the lecturer with his table, and the screen and every thing near it, in one immense but momentary conflagration.

"And now," says Rob. "I'm going to show you how gas is made. You can get gas out of most things, but it's generally got out of coal; the coal is heated just enough for the gas to pass out of it, and then what is left is called coke. If I take this bit of paper and heat it before this hot fire here

at the grate, you see it turns brown; it don't burn at first, but smoke passes off from the paper, and you see here I can light this smoke before the paper is burnt to ashes. Well, it's the same with coals. Now, look here, here's a tobacco pipe; the bowl of it where the tobacco goes is full of coals. I have covered the bowl up with damp clay to prevent the gas escaping into the fire. I put this bowl into the fire, and when it gets hot enough, the carburetted hydrogen gas will come out down the stem in a blue sort of smoke, and I can light it."

Sure enough, in a minute or so a thin stream of smoke was seen issuing from the mouth of the pipe stem, and Rob taking a lighted match touched the smoke, which immediately turned into a pale yellowish flame.

Rob now announced the final experiment, which he called "the exhibition of the oxyhydrogen light, with which would be combined the combustion of magnesium wire."

He placed two very large bags, one full of hydrogen, and the other full of oxygen gas, upon

the table; in front of them he had a ball of lime. The necks of his bags were fitted with cocks, so that he could easily turn on a jet from each of them, and weights were to be placed upon the bags to force the gas out in a powerful jet; the oxygen and hydrogen jets were to be turned on to each other, and thrown in one combined ignited jet upon the lime ball. The light to be produced by this jet on the lime ball was no other than the famous limelight.

“Now you fellows, Robinson and Martin, come up here and help with the last great effect to be produced by a combined experiment. I have shown you what you knew before, that coals will burn. You have seen the gas that was thrown off when they were half burned, for we lighted up the smoke just now. When I have got my bags ready I will show you a far more wonderful gas light; but whilst this is preparing I shall get Robinson and Martin to hold two long bits of wire that look like common silver wires, and you will then see that metal itself will light up when touched with

a candle, and beat the coal gas and the candle and most other lights.”

“Into fits?” suggested Robinson, who was quite ready for the operation.

The plan of the last great transformation scene was as follows:—Rob in the middle with his bags of oxygen and hydrogen and his lump of lime; Tom Robinson to the right of the lecturer’s table, Harry Martin to the left. These two assistants were to keep up a blaze of magnesium wire until the lime light was ready. Then Rob was to turn his jet of gas on to the lime ball, the magnesium wire was to go out, leaving the room in perfect darkness, in the midst of which an immense limelight was to be seen in all its splendour.

“Now,” cried Rob, “hold up the wire.”

And both boys lighted their coil of wire, which instantly illuminated the room about fifty times more than daylight, as the children thought. Every little face shone out like a bright cherub, seen in an atmosphere of blinding brilliancy. The children shaded their eyes, some turned away from

the intolerable radiance, and started to see their shadow pitch black upon the wall, as though some one had been painting them there in ink—nay, the shadows looked more substantial than the children; but their delighted attention was this time triumphantly secured, they were thrilled with admiration and ecstasy.

“Oh!” cried Pet, “isn’t it beautiful, isn’t it lovely, isn’t it like the angels?” and shading her eyes she leant up against me, as if the light was knocking her down.

As the intense centres of molten white heat waned and blazed out, and then blazed up again with each new coil, there ran through the room, not noisy applause, but that kind of suppressed groan of delight with which a crowd invariably greets any particularly good effect of fireworks. All this time Rob was absorbed with his bags and his ball of lime. I can safely say that no one but himself took the smallest interest in them—the magnesium light was far too good for any other flame to have a chance of success, how-

ever scientific. But science had a more terrible surprise in store for us than we imagined, and up to the last moment we remained in the most blessed and blissful ignorance of the fearful event that was close at hand.

“It’s ready,” says Rob. “I’m going to heave the weight on to the hydrogen bag; put out the wire, we must have it all dark.”

Now Rob had quite forgotten that he had left lying open upon the table a razor with which he had proposed to show how hairs and wet paper might be cut in the air—an experiment he had however omitted as not sufficiently exciting for his somewhat restless audience; so he heaved his bag of hydrogen unsuspectingly just on to this fatal razor, and taking up a weight, he plumped it down rather too heavily upon the bag. This brought the edge of the razor into contact with the bag, cut it through, and the hydrogen instantaneously rushed out. At this moment Tom Robinson, still waving a piece of lighted wire, came forward to see what was the matter, and the consequence was a

terrific explosion, for, as is well known, hydrogen mixing with air, ignites easily. A bottle of sulphuric acid was blown to pieces over poor Rob; everything on the table, phials, bowls, powders, plates, etc., was smashed and scattered about. Tom



Blown up!

and Harry, in a frenzy of terror, threw the blazing magnesium wire away. One part of it fell upon a little Douglass girl, and in a moment she was enveloped in flames. The children rose all to-

gether with screams of terror. In another moment the only light in the room was the blazing frock of poor Minnie Douglass, and she rushed towards her sister and set her on fire; but Rob with admirable presence of mind had already torn down a heavy curtain, and rushing to the poor girls, threw them down one on the top of the other, and then fell upon them both with the curtain, and well-nigh smothered them. The children were still screaming with agony, for they were badly burnt, but the flames were extinguished. The rest of the children had tried to rush to the door, where they were met by the nurse, who had by this time lighted a candle, and such a scene of wild terror and confusion then met her gaze as I hope few children's parties have ever or will ever present.

Sophia Marsden, who had been upset and thrown over a bench in the first rush, was lying on the floor in a sort of faint; she had struck her forehead, and the blood was flowing from one of her temples. Amy was sitting huddled up by her side, sobbing violently, but more frightened than hurt.

The two little Douglass girls were still entangled together in the curtain with the unlucky Rob; they were badly scorched, and crying bitterly.

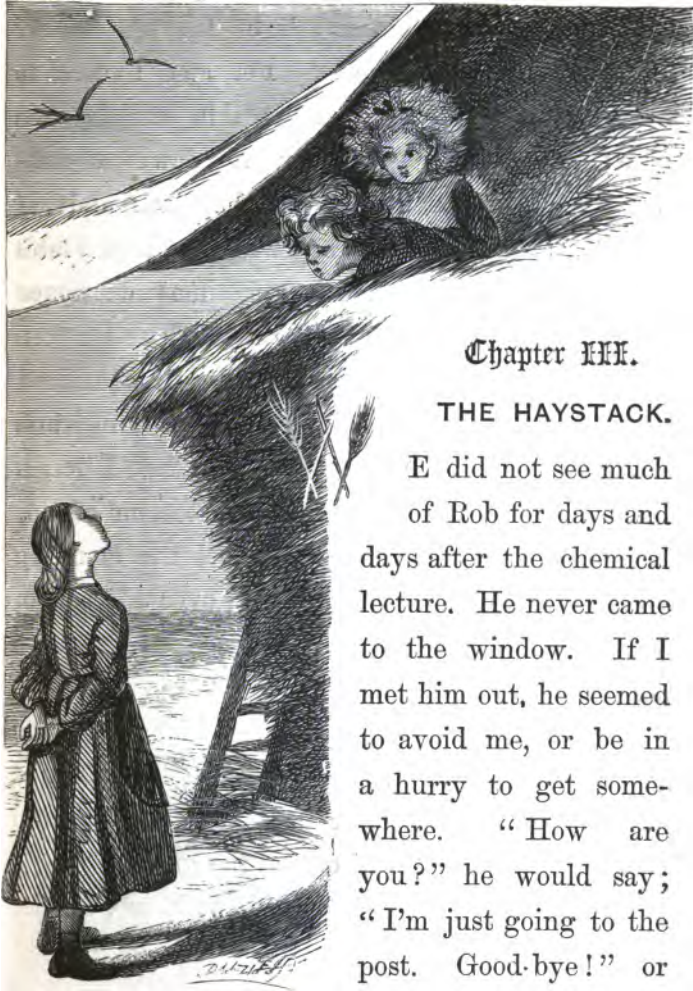
Others got off with bruises and terror; one boy had his arm in a sling for a fortnight afterwards. In the rush to the door every one seemed to have tumbled over every one else, and got themselves mixed up in the most extraordinary manner with the chairs and benches, so that few reached the door.

By a happy instinct the moment the explosion took place I seized Pet, who never once lost her presence of mind, round the waist and swung her to one side of the room against the wall and away from all the rest, so we escaped being bruised or tumbled or set on fire. I got off with a bad stain or two from one of the "solutions," and Pet's arm was slightly cut with a fragment of glass, but she never screamed nor even moved, except when I pulled her away. All the rest were literally lying in heaps about the floor, many really hurt, and more frightened.

What Rob said to his mamma about all this I don't know, nor did I ever hear exactly what Mrs. Ainslie said to Rob. At first every one was too busy succouring the wounded and terrified children to think of anything else. All I know is that just as my soup had killed the feasts, so Rob's explosion did for the chemical lectures; we never had any more.

Months afterwards Rob once hinted that he had discovered a new and striking experiment of some sort which he thought could be introduced into a lecture on chemistry; but Mrs. Ainslie only said, "Good gracious me, my dear boy, don't talk to me of such a thing, remember that dreadful gas bottle.





Chapter III.

THE HAYSTACK.

HE did not see much of Rob for days and days after the chemical lecture. He never came to the window. If I met him out, he seemed to avoid me, or be in a hurry to get somewhere. "How are you?" he would say; "I'm just going to the post. Good-bye!" or

“Have you seen Robinson?” or “How’s Mabel? I can’t stop. Good-bye!” Pet and I used to meet privately sometimes outside the garden gate; and one day we went down to the farmyard, and got up into the haystack and sat there for some time. Rob never alluded to the fatal evening; and although Pet sometimes mentioned the subject, it was always with an awe-stricken look, and under her breath.

After some weeks I discovered that Mabel and Rob took private walks together, and once I found them in a summer-house at the bottom of our garden quite unexpectedly. Mabel was standing close before him; he was stooping over the bench, breathing upon something; it was smoking—there was a smell of sulphur.

“Blow it out—quick,” I heard Mabel say in a hurried tone of voice; and poor Rob shuffled a lot of stuff into his trouser pocket; a pill box and a half-empty phial rolled out on the ground.

“Oh, I see you!” I said with a chuckle, “You’re making experiments.”

"We're not!" said Mabel, boldly telling a lie.

"Oh!" said Rob, whose conscience was more scrupulous, "not exactly experiments. I was showing what might be done under certain circumstances; the real experiment, you know, would require all sorts of things—a dark room, and a bowl of water, and a sponge, and lots of different powders. I could not do it in the summer-house."

"No," cut in Mabel eagerly, strengthening her position, "of course he could not do it in the summer-house!"

"The effect would be splendid. Look here—here's some sulphur and saltpetre."

"All right," I said, anxious to get off the scientific part; "I won't tell."

"There's nothing to tell about," said Mabel, preparing to leave the summer-house.

"Except that you tell lies," I retorted.

"You sit up in the haystack, you bad, wicked boy—alone with Pet!" and Mabel turned fiercely upon me, as was her wont when I crossed her, and gave me such a look that although no one had

ever forbidden us to sit in the haystack, I felt quite guilty, and was glad enough to get rid of Mabel and her companion as soon as possible. When they had got a little way off, I relieved my own feelings and sense of injured innocence by taking up a small rotten apple, and throwing it at them, and at the same time I darted round the summer-house and escaped through the back garden gate.

On the other side of the hedge, oddly enough, I found Pet; as she saw me she wiped her eyes hastily—she had been crying.

“What’s the matter?” said I, running up to her, and giving her a loud kiss. “Has any one been bullying you? Where is he? I’ve got a splendid stick—a bran-new cherry-stick; Joe cut it for me. I want to lick some one.”

“Oh, Ben,” said Pet heaving a deep sigh, “I’m so miserable! The cook’s drowned the kittens!” and she sobbed again as if her heart would break.

“Oh! never mind; we’ll get some more—there’s lots more kittens,” I said vaguely.

“ But I like those kittens. I want those kittens,” cried Pet, refusing to be consoled.

“ Well, look here ! ” I said, “ where are they ? ”

“ In the tub—at the very bottom ! ” sobbed Pet.

“ We’ll get them out.”

“ You can’t bring them to life ! ”

“ No, but we’ll dry them ! ”

“ They won’t eat ! ”

“ No, but we’ll lay them out.”

“ You can’t keep them ! ”

“ No,” I said thoughtfully, baffled but not beaten.

“ What shall we do with them ? ”

“ Bury them ! ” I cried, as the brilliant thought occurred to me. Pet’s face brightened. “ Come along,” I said, pulling her by the arm ; “ we’ll bury them in your garden ; you shall lay them out. I’ll dig the grave, and we’ll take a bit of slate and write on it that cook killed them ; that they hadn’t done anything wrong, and that we buried them, and then the date, you know—date of birth and death—”



Here lie four kittens.

THE ...

It is ... will do ...

Some ...

As ...

Then ...

...
...
...
...

It ...



“It was the same day,” sighed Pet.

“One date will do then,” said I. “That’s all the better; there mightn’t be room for two, you know.”

This seemed quite satisfactory, so we went to the tub, got the drowned things out, and carried them on a spade to Pet’s garden, where they were soon buried.

It was wonderful how the funeral rites seemed to cheer us both; we got almost merry, patting down the ground very hard, and making the spade smack soundly over the remains of the four departed kittens.

Then Pet wrote the inscription in a fine bold hand—

“HERE LIE FOUR KITTENS:
COOK KILLED THEM,
BEN AND PET BURIED THEM.
18—.”

After this I fetched some apples and nuts, and we both went off to the haystack. I got up first, then I pulled up Pet; when we were at the top

we made a sort of nest, just large enough for two, under the tarpauling stretched above us, and whenever we heard footsteps or voices we lay quite still, and let them call till they were tired. It was long before our retreat was discovered, but when it was—through Mabel, of course—it was forbidden. Why, I don't know; but I have always noticed that whenever children are what is call "found out" in anything, however innocent, they are sure to be "forbidden" to do it. One of the Martin boys was taught by our Joe the gardener to whistle on his fists; so when his nurse found this out she thought it best to be on the safe side, and said, "Master Harry, I forbid you to whistle on your fists; your mamma would be very angry if she knew you whistled on your fists!"

The effect of this was that all the boys in the neighbourhood came to Joe, and tipped him with pennies and tobacco to teach them to whistle on their fists.

One day Rob showed us how to make sugar

plums by taking a lump of white sugar, heating it at the flame of the candle, and dropping it in little brown lumps on a piece of white paper ; but as soon as this was discovered, we were all forbidden ever to attempt such a thing. The consequence was, I am afraid, that ever so many lumps of sugar were privately secreted for private experiments of a forbidden nature. Pet was passionately fond of blowing soap bubbles ; but there came a day when the nurses generally with one accord set their face against soap bubbles, and this pastime was forbidden even in summer and out of doors. There was much that was mysterious to me in my bringing up : why innocent things should be forbidden ; why we were allowed to enjoy ourselves at one time, and not at another, apparently without rhyme or reason ; why sometimes we were treated and talked to like grown-up people, and at others like little idiots, without common sense or common feeling ; why the stupid ones got punished, as if they were obstinate ; and why the bold, lying, obstinate ones got so often

let off, and why, for want of a little tact and presence of mind, the innocent constantly got punished for the guilty. Looking back, it is quite awful to think of the stripes which fell on my shoulders, whilst Mabel, the real offender, stalked off proudly in her self-righteous and patronizing way. She got the last word somehow; if a lie was to be told, I had to do it; if fruit was to be stolen from the garden, she made me take it, not exactly by asking, but by tempting and inciting; then she would eat it, and when found out,—deny that she had been a party to the fraud, and hand me over to be whipt. Of course I felt guilty; I had done the deed, and took my whipping; but it was not soothing to hear her say out loud before Mama,

“Oh! you naughty, naughty boy—to try and lead me into a scrape by giving me the fruit you had taken.”

“You showed me the fruit,” I said, sobbing indignantly; “you told me I could climb up and take it, only I must not.”

“And you did. Oh! you bad boy; and you left some of it in my room. How was I to know where it came from! Of course, I thought that Mama had been in, and put it there herself.”

So I was whipt, smarting far more from a sense of injustice than with the pain.

As for poor Pet, she was sharp and clever and brave in her way, but could not defend herself. She was often in scrapes out of sympathy for others. She was always leaning on others, and trusting them, and ready to take blame for herself. She was the little scape-goat of our circle; and I really think that to save another pain or annoyance, she did not so much mind bearing it herself. She felt others' troubles so quickly—if any one cried, Pet was always the one to cry with them; if any one was punished, Pet was always the first to console them, to bring them sweets, to give them her own toys, to beg them off, to make excuses for them, and take the blame on herself. I often wondered how quiet she was when injustice was done to her; she was so slow

to notice it; so slow to suspect any evil in others. So the other children as a rule let her bear a good deal; but then every one loved her for her sweet and generous disposition—every one except Mabel—Mabel positively disliked her; and if there was a person in the world she disliked, which I question, it was Mabel.

The funeral over, as I said, we repaired to our favourite nest up in the haystack. I pulled Pet in, and made her a soft seat by my side. She was more than usually affectionate and talkative; the sad episode of the kittens, with the subsequent expansion of feeling—I had almost said exhilaration—at the early grave, had melted her tender nature. She needed all sorts of kindness and comfort, and she was prepared to give any amount of confidence and affection in return; and I thought what I have often thought since, “How sweet it is to comfort those whom we love!” On the present occasion I did this by cracking a Brazilian nut and giving her half, which she ate very demurely.

“Do you know, Ben,” she said, with one of those sudden little tosses of her head, to which I was accustomed, and which meant that she had been thinking, and had quite made up her mind, “I should like to live with you always?”

“Well, look here, Pet,” said I, for I saw no particular difficulty in the matter, “let’s arrange!”

“Yes,” said Pet, settling herself in the hay quite delighted, “let’s arrange at once.”

“We can settle it all, you know,” I continued; “we needn’t tell any one—not yet—but we can settle it between ourselves. How old are you?”

“Nearly nine.”

“Well, I’m ten. I must marry you, you know, of course.”

“Yes, of course; but not now—we shouldn’t be allowed; we’re too young, I suppose. It’s very absurd children shouldn’t be allowed to marry.”

“Well, but, you know, we can be engaged. I read the other day that some prince or other was engaged to some princess, and she was only three years old.”

“ Oh ! but that was in fairyland.”

“ No, in real history ; it really happened. Mama read it out of a history book.”

This seemed to settle it. It was a great comfort to think that the thing had really happened, because then it might happen again.

“ Well, then, you’re engaged to me, that’s settled. I suppose I shall have to go to school, and we shall see each other in the holidays ; when I’m at home we can play together. Then I shall have a profession and earn money when I’m grown up, and I shall keep a house of my own, and have servants and horses and carriages, and do what I like, and then I can marry you.”

“ Of course, when you can do what you like ; if you like to marry me, of course you can marry me. Oh, what fun it will be !” And Pet clapped her hands and jumped up and down in the hay with delight.

“ But I say, Pet, there was a match broken off the other day. Sophia Marsden’s eldest cousin was going to marry an officer in the Guards, and her

papa found out he was in debt, and made her break it off."

"Oh!" says Pet, "if you were in debt I would not break it off; besides, you wouldn't be in debt, you know."

"No, of course not; but, you know, we've settled it all. You needn't tell the others, because they'd laugh at us, and Mabel is certain to say it's wrong, and she'd tell, and we might get punished. Well, we shan't make any change just yet; only, you know," I added with some importance, "of course, if Harry Martin kisses you, or pulls your legs, or holds you by the hair and makes you cry,—of course, I shall consider it my duty to punch his head."

"He's a rough boy," said Pet, nestling close to me.

"I should like to see him dare to tease you," said I, passing my arm round Pet's waist and giving her a loud kiss.

"I say," said Pet suddenly, "I think the hay's wet."

"How can it be?" I said; my stockings and

knickerbockers being thick winter ones, I had felt nothing, but I could not help seeing that whilst we had been absorbed in conversation, the hem of Pet's petticoat, at least, was spotted with wet. I looked up and saw that through a crack in the tarpaulin, the rain, for it had begun to drizzle, was spitting through; in a moment I remembered that it had been raining in the night.

"Jump up!" I cried, as I felt the place where Pet had been sitting; it was warm, but evidently damp. "Pet, you'll catch cold; you had better go to our kitchen fire and ask cook to let you dry your clothes. Ma'll be so angry."

"I'm afraid she will if she finds it out," said Pet, shaking herself violently and looking very uneasy. We had both forgotten in our excitement to speak low, and now a well-known voice reached us from the foot of the haystack.

"Oh! so you're there again. Well, I suppose you've asked leave. I shall certainly tell Mama. I know when Joe hears of it, he will be extremely angry at your spoiling all the hay!"

“Spoiling the hay !” I shouted derisively, “who was burning things on the garden bench ?”

“Not I,” said Mabel. “I can’t help Rob carrying lucifers in his pocket, and if he drops one and it goes off by mistake, that’s nothing to do with you two sneaking off and sitting up in the hay all by yourselves, as if you were ashamed to be seen. Oh, Pet, you naughty, wicked girl, come down !” And Pet began to descend, but, alas ! in descending, it was too plain that her clothes had got wet.

“Wet through,” said Mabel very quietly, with one of her self-satisfied sneers.

“Go along you—you ugly, nasty, ill-natured, horrid thing !” I cried in a rage, whilst I felt the tears choking me, for I knew Pet was in for a scolding, perhaps worse.

“Ugly, nasty, ill-natured, horrid !” repeated Mabel, more and more satisfied with the part she was playing, and the pickle she had caught us in. “Very well, Ben ; I shall ask Mama whether you are to be allowed to call me such names, and I dare say your Papa will give you a sound whipping.”

“You ought to be whipped yourself,” I cried, feeling that nothing more could be lost; “and when I come down I’ll give you such a whack, I will—I don’t care. You’re a cruel thing to Pet; it isn’t her fault. I’ll pay you out!—I’ll pay you out!” And springing from the haystack, I seized Mabel furiously for once; and what I should have done I hardly know had not Papa himself turned up on the scene, and taking me by the arm held me tight, and said severely,

“Ben, I am sorry to see this.”

There was more in those words than might seem. I knew the tone of voice, and trembled. Papa was in his worst mood for dealing with an offender like me. As always happened when the crisis came, I was either speechless or passionate; and as always happened, Mabel was ready to turn everything to her own account. Whilst I stood quivering with fury and fear in my father’s grasp, without being able to say one word for myself or Pet, Mabel sank down on the ground with a piteous expression of face, and sobbed (there were no tears), apparently

half with pain and half from wounded sensibility at the unjust outrage she pretended to have just suffered.

“Oh, Papa!” she said, “I only told them the hay was wet and they ought not to sit in it, and Ben flew at me, and—and—” Here she covered her face with her handkerchief.

This was too much for me. Dear Pet was standing by her side, helplessly sobbing, and her trouble was very real. So when Mabel gave this last twist to her own disgraceful conduct—

“Liar!” I screamed; “Liar!”

And then Pet broke in piteously,

“Oh! please do not punish him; it’s no one’s fault—except mine, perhaps—booh—ooh—ooh.”

“My dear Pet,” said my father gravely, “I do not blame you; you have not acted wisely in getting wet, but I hope you will not suffer from the effects. Go home at once, and tell your nurse what has happened. Mabel, I shall insist upon Ben’s begging your pardon. I hope he has not hurt you much; and as for you, sir (still holding me in a

tight grip), go indoors, go up to my room (I knew what that meant), and wait till I come."

As I went round the haystack to slink into the house through the kitchen, I met Rob. I expect he had not been far off, and had heard something if not all of what had passed. I pretended to take not the slightest notice of him, and trying to swallow down my tears—I hated the servants to catch me crying—I went up to my father's room with a heavy heart.

When I'm to be punished I like to be punished at once. When we used to go to the dentists in London he used to keep us waiting ever so long; there was the same motto in all the books on his table,

"Man was born to pain and trouble,
Both with single teeth and double."

As we read this motto over and over again, our teeth began to chatter with fright, and the suspense at last grew horrible; but I had rather wait at the dentist's than upstairs in my father's room on certain occasions. Well, at last I heard his dreadfully

deliberate footstep on the stairs; he came in with a cane in his hand and began as he always did to justify the step he was about to take. He might have spared himself and me the trouble of an explanation—he did not understand how matters stood, although he thought he did, and I could not explain it; when I was angry my head got into a muddle, and I could not remember things in order or explain anything clearly.

“Ben,” said my father, “I am sorry to be obliged to do now what I threatened to do last time you lost all control over yourself, and acted in a violent and refractory manner. I let you off then, but I threatened to cane you the very next time you disgraced yourself—hold out your hand.” I was not a coward, and I held out my hand and received without flinching two smart cuts from the cane.

“Hold out your other hand,” and I held it out to receive two other cuts. My father then left me to my own meditations, and when he was gone I began to cry, not so much with pain as with annoy-

ance and anger at having again received stripes which ought by rights to have descended upon Mabel's back.

In about an hour in comes my father again, this time with a kinder look in his face; somehow it did not soothe me though. I was standing looking out of the window; it was raining fast. I did not turn when my father came in; he drew a chair up, sat down by my side, and taking me gently by the shoulder, drew me towards him.

"My dear boy," he began, "I am sure you are sorry for what you have done, and I think you will feel ready to beg Mabel's pardon."

"Papa!" I said, my sense of justice triumphing over my dread of punishment, "Papa, I can't do it; you must cane me again if you like, but I can't beg Mabel's pardon. She don't deserve it. She made me do all I did, and she knows it." My father's face again got very grave.

"You struck Mabel!" he said.

"Yes."

"And you called her several bad names."

“ Yes.”

“ And you gave way to a violent and angry temper ! ”

I was silent.

“ And you now refuse to beg Mabel’s pardon, when she offers to forgive you.”

“ I don’t want her forgiveness ; she’s always teasing me and Pet. If you knew all you’d make her beg our pardon.” I felt the time was come for an explanation, but I couldn’t give it. I did not know how to explain exactly what had happened ; I could only blubber out,

“ If you knew all—ask Pet, ask—Rob—”

“ I *will* know all,” said my father, rising with a look which seemed to say, “ and if it does not explain your conduct favourably, you will not be let off without further punishment.” When he got to the door, he turned round and said,

“ Ben, when you have been in the wrong, you have never refused to ask pardon of another, but you refuse now ; yet you can give me no reason. I shall sift this matter to the bottom, whatever be

the result. You have been justly punished for your violence and bad temper; but before I punish you further for pride and obstinacy, I shall ascertain whether there is the smallest excuse for you."

What was he going to do? thought I. What he did turned out splendidly for me; he was going to have a regular court-martial. As an indirect witness I could be effective enough, if only I had not got to relate a number of events in order. I could blurt out very unpleasant truths, and prejudice a case very successfully. My father was a just man, and although he never understood me, he always meant to deal fairly with all of us; and if it came to sifting, I said to myself, "Let him sift; sooner or later Mabel will catch it if he sifts." And my spirits rose considerably as I heard him go downstairs. I felt the result of the investigation would be favourable to me, and I already congratulated myself on having had all the punishment I was likely to get.

When I came down I was not treated as if in disgrace, but in a sort of half and half way. At

dinner-time Mabel pretended that her head ached dreadfully from the effects of my violence ; but she ate with great appetite, no bruises whatever could she show, and it was pretty clear to every one that she was what we used to call “ putting it on.”

After dinner we were kept in ; presently, to our surprise, Pet and Rob arrived, looking very grave and nervous ; they were taken straight to Papa’s study, and there we were called to join them.

Papa sat in his arm-chair looking like a judge,



and we children stood in a row before him. Of the whole lot I think I felt least uncomfortable. Mabel was very excited and eager to speak, but Papa

wouldn't let her. "Wait till you're spoken to," he said rather sharply, as Mabel began to describe her sufferings under the unprovoked assault. Pet stood by me with her eyes fixed on the ground, and her two little hands in her two little apron pockets. Rob stood next, looking pale and somewhat anxious. My father turned to Rob and Pet and said,

"I am sorry, my dear children, to bring you over here on so unpleasant a matter, but after the quarrel of this morning I am anxious to do justice to every one. Ben has misconducted himself, and has been punished. Ben, I hope you are sorry for having lost your temper and behaved in so violent a manner?"

I said "Yes," in a grudging tone of voice, inwardly wishing that I had had time to give Mabel one regular good slap at least; for although I was sorry at not being able to keep my temper, which got me into all sorts of scrapes, I felt Mabel richly deserved a slap.

"And now, Ben," continued my father, "it seems

to me if you confess yourself in the wrong, you owe an apology to Mabel; are you prepared to make it?"

"I can't, Papa," I said, beginning to boil over again, but gulping it down; "she don't deserve it, she really don't."

"Why? What more have you to say?" My head began to swim; I felt I could not put my points; the whole thing was so unfair, and yet because Mabel had been cool and cautious there was hardly anything in what she had done or said which would bear repeating as an accusation.

"She's an unfair, aggravating thing; she hates Pet, and is always trying to make mischief about nothing, and get us punished."

"Oh, how dare you!" exclaimed Mabel, apparently horrified. My father looked puzzled, and turned towards Rob, who stood in an agony of suspense, twisting his hands behind him.

"Did you hear anything of this?"

"I heard something. I—I was behind the hay-

stack. I—I think Mabel meant to tell them to get down, because—because of the wet, and—and I think she—she offended them.”

“She called names first,” said little Pet boldly. She had more sense in her head than all of us. Why couldn’t I have said that—that was the very thing to weigh with my father.

“Hey! what names?” said he sharply.

“She called me a naughty, wicked girl,” said Pet, waxing bold. “Ben did not like that, of course, no more did I. I wasn’t naughty and wicked.”

“What had you been doing?”

“Nothing,” said Pet.

“Oh!” broke in Mabel, “you know you had been spoiling the hay and getting yourself wet through!”

“I didn’t know the hay was wet.”

“Had you been forbidden to go to the haystack?”

“No,” Pet and I chimed in together.

“Had you been tossing the hay about?”

“No. I am sure we did it no harm; we sat quite quietly.”

“Then,” said my father, turning severely upon Mabel, “what right had you to call Pet a naughty, wicked girl?”

“I didn’t!” was scarcely out of Mabel’s wicked mouth, when Rob gave a little start; he was evidently on pins and needles.

“Rob, did you hear Mabel say naughty, wicked girl to Pet?” Poor Rob struggled for a moment between his affection for Mabel, which was very great, and his respect for truth; it was a trying moment.

“I don’t think Mabel meant to offend them,” he said hurriedly, but my father calmly repeated the question.

“Did she call Pet a naughty, wicked girl?”

Rob was silent. His lips moved convulsively; his hands twitched and twisted themselves into all sorts of knots behind him.

“My dear boy,” said my father kindly but firmly, “you must answer my question.”

Mabel's eyes glared almost fiercely at Rob. She was not allowed to speak. She was as red as a turkey-cock. It was a moment of intense anxiety to me and Pet. Pet nudged Rob; he had now got into a sort of a dream and seemed as if he could not speak.

"Dear Rob," said Pet, "do tell the truth; she did call names first, didn't she?"

"Yes!" said Rob in a cadaverous voice, as if in that one word he had staked his all; but it was just like Rob, he always came out well when pushed to it, and nobody had ever heard him tell a lie. Mabel nearly sprang at him like a little tiger, but a severe look from my father kept her in her place.

"I am beginning to understand what really took place. Pet and Ben had gone to the haystack meaning to do no harm; they found it wet and then Mabel, without any provocation, as far as I can see, came and called them bad names."

"Yes! yes!" cried both of us, "that's just it."

"Wait a minute," said my father. "I'll have this out. What occurred when Pet got down?"

“Mabel saw I was wet, and laughed, and that made me angry.”

“It was because Pet was crying that Mabel laughed—because she hoped we should get into a scrape, and then she threatened to tell and say all sorts of things, and make us out bad, when we hadn’t done anything wrong, only got wet by mistake, and then—and then—”

“And then,” Pet interrupted, “and then Ben said she was an ugly, nasty, ill-natured, horrid thing; and wasn’t she?” added Pet, innocently looking up in my father’s face. I think I saw something like a suppressed smile steal over the judge’s countenance.

“My dear, if you do not like being called names yourself, you must be careful not to call other people names.”

“Yes, but Mabel only laughed at the names Ben called her, and seemed so pleased to think she would get Ben whipt, and then Ben jumped down and—”

“That’s enough,” said my father; “I know all the rest.”

“Mabel,” continued he, turning upon that young lady with a severe countenance, “you have acted the part of a mean girl; you have been glad to find your play-fellows in trouble, and you have succeeded in getting one of them, your own brother, into disgrace. Ben had no right to spring upon you and treat you with violence or call names, but then it must be admitted that you called names first, and that you provoked him by your manner to misbehave himself. But, since you have been in this study, you have done worse than all this. When I punished Ben this morning, I punished him amongst other things for calling you a liar; a few minutes ago you proved yourself to be one,—you denied that you had said words which you certainly did say; in short, you have, in the presence of your play-mates told me a deliberate lie. Ben has been punished enough; after what has passed I shall not ask him to beg your pardon; you have received no real injury, and you have only yourself to thank for Ben’s unruly temper being directed against you. And as for you, Miss—” Here Rob broke in.

“Please, sir, I’m sure Mabel meant no harm ; she too was aggravated, and it was my fault.” And Rob, who was now quite collected and calm, having only himself to criminate, proceeded to tell how he had not been able to resist the temptation of showing Mabel just a specimen experiment with sulphur in the summer-house, and how I had come upon them and jeered at them, because experiments had been forbidden ; and then how Mabel, still angry at being discovered experimenting with Rob, had suddenly found me and Pet together on the wet haystack, and seized the opportunity of retaliating.

“And please, Sir,” added Pet looking down and blushing very much, “it was me who wanted to go to the haystack, and I asked Ben ; and it isn’t Ben’s fault, it’s my fault, and I’m very sorry, and—” here, partly from the general excitement, and a number of other conflicting feelings, Pet, who had borne up and been the saving of me during this trying scene, broke down and began to cry. My father merely added,

“Rob is to blame for making experiments, and

Pet must not go to the haystack any more ; but all this has very little to do with Mabel. Leave the room, Mabel."

Rob and Pet were then sent home I was received back into favour with a general caution about



my temper. Mabel was condemned to bread and water, sent to bed at six o'clock, and forbidden to go to a party at the Douglasses that night, where I looked forward to enjoying myself immensely with

Pet. But alas ! That night Pet, in consequence of having got wet, was seized with a dreadful sore throat and cold. She was put into a hot bath with mustard, as she afterwards told me ; had a mustard poultice on her chest the next day, which hurt her dreadfully, and was not allowed out of the house for a week.

We often looked with longing eyes at the haystack, but we never ventured to scale it again ; and Pet, who was very fond of sitting about in nooks on the grass or on stumps of trees, would hardly ever sit down at all when out of doors. One day, indeed, in very cold weather she was very anxious to put a sack on the top of a very large snowball which Joe had made for us children, and sit upon it, but when Mama heard of it, she poked her head out of the window and cried,

“Pet, Pet! remember the damp hay and the mustard poultice!”



Got into hot water!



Chapter IV.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

It was bitterly cold. We — that is Mabel and I—had got a row of chestnuts on the nursery hob roasting; they constantly burst and tumbled into the fire; it was very annoying; we got them out with tongs,

and tried to eat them, but it always happened that half the chestnut was burnt to a cinder, and the other half was not roasted at all.

As we were both bemoaning our want of success, in this comparatively harmless branch of cooking, in comes Rob with two bottles full of something frozen.

“Look here,” says he, holding up the bottles, “all our water-pipes have burst. Do you know why that is?”

“Why?” said Mabel.

“Because the water has frozen hard in them and burst them.”

“Why, it never burst them before,”

“That’s just it,” says Rob, delighted with the opportunity for a scientific explanation. “If Mama had let me give another lecture, without any dangerous experiments, you know, I could have explained all about the pipes in a frost, and the bursting might have been prevented.”

“How?” inquired Mabel.

“Oh, bother!” I said, “Come here and look at

the chestnuts," but I was overruled by Rob, who took no notice of me, and addressing himself to Mabel, continued,

"You see, water contracts up to a certain degree, 32, and expands after that—that is when it freezes; that is, frozen water occupies more space than unfrozen water. Well, here's a pipe full of unfrozen water—that's all right. Now freeze it in the pipe, it immediately wants more room, and as there is no more room, because it filled the pipe before, and as it can't get out by running along the pipe because it's froze, it bursts the pipe."

"Yes," says Mabel in her most intelligent manner.

"Well," continued the philosopher, "if you want to prevent the pipe bursting, you must prevent the water freezing. Put some straw or hay round the pipe, and there you are; the pipe won't freeze because the hay keeps it warm. Do you see?"

"Yes," replied his only interested listener.

"Now air is just different; air always shrinks

with the cold, and always expands with the heat. All fluids don't freeze with the same quickness; heavy fluids, like milk, freeze slower than the light fluids, like water. This bottle," he continued—

"Come on," I shouted, "if all this stuff is any good, tell us why the chestnuts jump off the hob into the fire before they are cooked?"

Rob was very patient with the unscientific, but he never lost a chance of enlightening them, and when I threw out my suggestion, half as a taunt and half thinking he might have something useful to say, he leisurely laid down his little bottles of frozen milk and frozen water, and came up to the hob just in time to see a new chestnut hop into the fire.

"Of course," he said with the slightest touch of contempt, and a good deal of conscious superiority, "there's the use of science! You've made an experiment with the chestnuts and you don't know what it means; now," says Rob, posing himself again like a lecturer, "if I were giving a lecture—"

“Don’t give a lecture,” I cried.

“Ben, you must let him speak ; hold your stupid tongue, and if you want to know anything, listen.”

“ I was only going to explain about the chestnuts—it’s like what I was saying about air just now. When air’s hot it expands, just as when water’s cold it expands after 32 degrees. There’s air in chestnuts.”

“Nonsense!” I said, “there’s no air in chestnuts.”

“Yes, there is, there’s air in almost everything, and there’s air in chestnuts ; not much, you know, just enough to fill the chestnut shell along with the inside of the chestnut itself. When you heat the chestnut the air expands, and as it can’t get out it bursts the shell, and the shock tumbles the chestnut into the fire.” He took a cold chestnut and put it into the fire.

“Get away!” he cried, and we all moved off to the other end of the room. In another moment “bang!” went the chestnut into atoms, part of it flying out into the room.

“That’s the air!” said he triumphantly. What a fellow Rob was for experiments!

“All right,” said I, for I could no longer doubt that Rob was right. “But how are we to roast them?”

“Cut a slit in them first,” says he, whipping out a penknife and cutting into the shell of one. “Now we’ll place this on the hob; when the air heats, it will get out quietly, and leave the chestnut to be roasted through; that’s the use of science,” he added proudly, “although you fellows are always sneering at me.”

I felt a little ashamed of myself, I confess. Rob was a good fellow, and patient enough with his gainsayers, and as I was meditating what to answer him,

“Here’s John!” (John was the Martins’ manservant) cries Mabel, who was looking out of the window, “with his new livery on, coming through the snow.” And in another moment there, sure enough, was a loud ring at the front door.

“I wonder what it is,” said Mabel, and we all

went to the nursery door. Nurse was coming upstairs. I leaned over the banisters and shouted,

“I say, Ann, what’s the matter—what’s brought Martins’ man, I mean?”

“Hush! Master Ben; you shouldn’t holloa so, and you shouldn’t say ‘Martins’ man,’ but Mr. Martin’s man-servant.”

“All right” (that was my favourite phrase), “all right, Mr. Martin’s man-servant,” I said, imitating Ann. “What’s Mr. Martin’s man-servant brought? Is Mr. Martin’s man-servant waiting for an answer—Mr. Martin’s man-servant?” Here I skilfully dodged Ann, who attempted to box my ears, and I retreated into the nursery, slamming the door in Ann’s face and shouting through the keyhole, “Mis-ter Mar-tin’s man-ser-vant!”

“Hold your tongue, Master Ben, or I’ll surely tell your ma of you,” said nurse, coming into the room looking very cross. “Pray how should I know what—”

“Mis-ter Mar-tin’s man-ser-vant,” I interposed. Here nurse again attempted to box my ears, but I

was too quick for her, and danced round the table, making mouths at her in such a way that she might easily see I was saying "Mr. Martin's man-servant" to myself.

Mabel and Rob were at the hob inspecting the successful chestnut roasted on scientific principles, when Mama entered with an open letter in her hand.

"Children," she said, "you'll be glad to hear that Mrs. Martin has been so kind as to ask you both to a party on Thursday evening next. I have no doubt Rob and Pet have been asked, as she intends to have all the children she knows in the neighbourhood; it is to be quite a large party, and if you are good you shall both go."

Of course we were highly delighted, and I took an early opportunity of asking Pet if she was likely to be there.

"I know," says Rob mysteriously, "there's going to be some fire-works, and some coloured fire out of doors. You will have to look through the window at it of course; it will be too cold to go out."

So it appeared that both the Ainslie children

had been asked before us; and Rob, who was rather thick with one of the Martin boys, happened to be behind the scenes. As it turned out, however, he was wrong. We got no fireworks that night—there happened to be enough fire without them.



The long-wished-for night arrived at last. At six o'clock the Ainslie's carriage drew up before our door; they were going to take us. I saw Pet huddled up in a warm fur rug.

“Come along, come along,” she cried, making room for me; “take care, don't crumple my frock, and be sure you don't kick my blue shoes, or rub my silk stockings, and do mind my hair! I declare, there's a ribbon off. Oh, dear!”

“Never mind,” said I, “we'll find it when we get out,” and we both huddled together under the great wolf-skin, whilst Rob and Mabel sat up much more grandly, but not nearly so snug and warm, in the back seats. I enjoyed my drive. Pet and I

got quite warm together ; the wheels were so soft upon the thick snow, the carriage made no noise, and we had a nice talk. When we got there, the hall was full of hats and cloaks and rugs ; most of the children had arrived. Pet jumped out, ran into the hall and shook herself—she *was* a Pet and no mistake. She wore a little blue silk tunic looped up, quite like a grown-up lady, over her white muslin skirt, only that was short of course, only just a little below her knees. She had pale blue ribbons in her hair, which was fine, crumpled, frizzled-looking hair. Mabel always called it carrotty, but that was because her own was of a different colour—a poor brown no-sort of colour, and not at all thick, whilst Pet's hair, though not long, was like a great fleecy cloud all round her head. The blue ribbon and the fleecy hair, and the merry blue eyes, and the dazzling complexion—only it was a little freckled, because she wouldn't keep out of the sun in summer,—it was a charming little picture !

As she stood waiting for us in the hall with her

little fan twisted round her wrist, and her little shiny pink silk stockings, and her little blue shoes, I certainly was more proud of her than ever. It was a comfort to think that as we were engaged, nobody else had any real right to speak to her, although, of course, I let the other fellows, because it would have been absurd to make a fuss, and then, of course, I played with the other girls, so it was all even.

Just then Sophia Marsden came through the hall; she was dressed in a long pink muslin, with a long train to it; she had a large yellow rose in her hair, and shook hands with me very good-humouredly and friendly, but I could not help thinking that she certainly was a little changed, and she seemed to feel that she had already ceased to belong to us children, without belonging to the grown-up people. I don't like that age myself. I had sooner be one thing or the other. It don't so much matter, perhaps, for girls; they always get attention somehow, but it is a bad age for boys, when they are too grand to romp, and stand about in imitation

tail coats, and talk to each other in cracked voices, because the real men don't care about them, and the growing-up girls prefer the real men, with a few exceptions by the way. But I am not now describing my young middle-age life; that came afterwards. On the night of that party, although Sophia Marsden was just sixteen, I was only ten, and Pet was only nine, and although I certainly was rather interested in Sophia Marsden in her new grown-up character, Pet was my friend.

"I say, Pet, isn't she a swell to-night?"

"I don't see much difference, only she's got a long gown, that's all. I shall have a long gown on by-and-by, only I shan't be able to jump about then half so much."

Rob had just been exchanging very stiff civilities with Amy Marsden, who was very shy, but who always seemed glad to see Rob, when Mabel called to him in an imperious tone,

"Don't you see we're waiting to go in!" So in another minute we entered the tea-room, where several children were already seated, and I had the

happiness of sitting close to Pet, and of seeing Rob and Mabel at the other end of the table.

The Douglasses were there. The Martin boys, of course, in their own house, took a great deal on themselves, and ordered every-one about, insisting on the timid little girls eating more than was good for them. There was a great sugared cake in the middle of the table, with tiny tin candlesticks, and coloured candles in them, burning all round it. It looked splendid ! like a mass of white alabaster, lighted from within. When the cake was cut, each child had one of the little candles, so all round the table there was a pretty illuminated ring of candles, lighting up the coloured dresses and smiling pink cheeks of the children.

Sophia Marsden made tea at one end ; she spilt all the cream, and blushed and almost cried with vexation.

The eldest Martin boy cut the cake, and nearly cut his thumb off, which he tied up in a bit of rag with a glove-finger over it, for the rest of the evening.

A little Douglass girl, who had been forced by Harry Martin to eat a large bit of cake she did not want, nearly choked herself, and was obliged to be carried out of the room.

Tom Robinson squirted some scent into Amy Marsden's eye, and made her cry.

Rob was sadly bullied for not eating enough, and pretending not to like cake, and before the end of tea I knew Mabel had managed to hide away a large quantity of sweets, biscuits, and crackers, which she was certain to say had all been given her, and none of which would find their way into my hands.

As for Pet and myself, we were busy enough in our way; if there was one thing which Pet fancied, it was little macaroon cakes, and I confess that I did secrete one or two of these for her, as she was too shy to do it for herself. Pet always behaved like a perfect little lady; she was always polite, she never lost her temper, and she never ate or drank too much like some little children, who think that as long as they can possibly cram in an

extra cake or swallow an extra sweetmeat, it is their bounden duty to do so. Mama used often to speak about this to me ; she used to say that the animals never ate too much, but always left off when they had had as much as was good for them ; this I confess I doubted, for Farmer Stubbles had a sheep that ate and ate until it tumbled down, and died of eating too much. Besides, what was the use of lecturing me about eating too much, that wasn't one of my faults. I often wonder why I was so constantly lectured about not doing things which I never wanted to do and never did.

Our gardener, Joe, was a teetotaller, but every week an old lady in black used to leave a tract at the lodge for him called 'Drunkard's Warning ;' outside was a horrible picture of a ragged man being taken to prison between two policemen and a crowd of hooting boys. I suppose the man was meant for Joe ; but, then, Joe never drank ; he was glad of the tract and always civil to the old lady, and I am afraid he used to light his pipes with the 'Drunkard's Warning.' Well, somehow or

other, it was unfortunate, but I was always reminded of two things when Mama used to preach to me about gluttony, and tell the old story about the animals: first, I thought of Joe and the 'Drunkard's Warning,' and secondly, I thought of Farmer Stubbles' sheep that ate itself to death.

The tea went off pretty well on the whole, and then all the children turned out into the large hall. It was nice and warm, but what was to be done next? Nobody seemed to know. The Martin boys flitted about mysteriously. At last, being able to contain himself no longer, Harry came up to Pet and me and whispered,

"Christmas-tree! Hush!" But in a very little time every one in the hall knew that there was to be a Christmas-tree. A bell rang, and we all began to ascend the large staircase leading to the drawing-room. Those behind heard groans of delight from those in front, who had reached the landing and were entering the wide-open drawing-room door.

Pet and I pressed on. Mabel had scrambled on first, dragging the reluctant Rob.

“Don’t push so!” cried several children.

“You’ve torn my dress!”

“Mabel Morrison, don’t be in such a hurry; you’re treading on me!”

But Mabel took not the slightest notice, and kept pushing on, getting poor Rob into bad odour, along with her. It was evident she meant to get the best place, have the first look and the first choice, and she was certainly thinking of nothing but herself. Rob was taken along with her, because he was her slave, and might be put forward to do things and to cover her own greedy exploits.

When first we came in sight of the Christmas-tree, it nearly took Pet’s breath away. It was a noble Christmas-tree—hundreds of coloured candles everywhere on the spreading branches, and the branches themselves laden with really costly sweet-meats, and figures of wax dolls beautifully dressed, and frosted ornaments that glittered like diamonds. At the top was a splendid Prince of Wales’ feathers

of blown glass, quivering and glittering over a crown of bright spangles, all the colours of the rainbow, and flashing with a thousand lights! And high above in a magic golden hoop swung a little cupid in wax, with a crown of real sugar in his hand, and bright gauzy wings like butterflies', only larger. At the foot of the tree there were splendid toys. A doll's house, a child's piano that played, a musical-box that you could play by turning the handle, and which looked like a hurdy-gurdy, beautiful whips, nice guns and toy pistols, enormous crackers, baskets of fine bonbons with liquid inside them, and ever so many boxes full of really nice toys.

I used to have an eye for a Christmas-tree. I was not easily taken in by show and candles. Candles are all very well, but what sort of things grow on the tree besides? that's the point, and who's to get them? that's another point. I have been at trees where everything on the tree was worthless, and yet it looked all right till you began to get the things; then the crackers wouldn't go

off, the contents weren't fit for a gentleman's child to eat; the playthings had evidently been bought at wretched shops, and cost nothing; the toys came to pieces, the wheels came off the carts, even the horses' manes were only gummed on instead of being properly glued or nailed (nails are best); battledores all limp; shuttle-cocks too heavy, half the feathers out; cheap boxes full of those horrid wooden and plaster fruits described in the first chapter—bah! the very thought of them makes me ill. Then on such occasions the candles were generally too thin, and burnt out too soon, and everybody thought every one else had got all the good things because he or she hadn't; the fact being that there were no good things to get.

I have been at all sorts of Christmas-trees in my time. Perhaps the worst kind of all is where just one or two children are singled out to have certain good things, and all the others are put off with trumperies; on such occasions the good things are of course displayed ostentatiously, and everybody chooses them; of course no one gets them except

the one or two favoured ones, and all the others are disappointed.

Well, the Martins' Christmas-tree was a regular good one. As far as it could be, everything seemed fair enough, and there were plenty of really good things for every one. Sometimes you have to wait such a time at these Christmas-trees before you get anything, and then the children get impatient; at others the children choose in turn, and then all the first get all the best things, and the lookers-on grow more and more woeful as they see their favourite toy carried away. But this tree was capitally managed. The great thing is to have order on these occasions; order until every one has at least got something, or else the little ones are certain to go to the wall. So we all joined hands, and formed one large ring round the tree; then we moved round and round it slowly enough for all the children to see everything, and then we jumped round it quicker, and just when the ring was beginning to romp round it, a signal was given, and we all stopped. Then Sophia Marsden, who was

a fine, tall girl, and could reach, and Mrs. Martin, who was a stout lady, and kept upsetting things, stepped into the ring, each with a pair of scissors, whilst such a nice governess, Miss Robin, the Martins' governess, went round the ring and said, pointing at each word to a child,

“ ‘ Peter—Piper—picked a—peck of—pickled—PEPPER.’ PEPPER go out and choose ! ” And whilst Pepper was half choosing or half being chosen for by Mrs. Martin, Miss Robin went on—

“ ‘ A peck of—pickled—pepper—Peter—Piper—PICKED.’ PICKED go out and choose ! ” So Picked ran into the ring to Sophia Marsden ; and Miss Robin continued, “ ‘ If Peter—Piper—picked a—peck of—pickled—PEPPER ; ’ PEPPER go out ! ‘ Where’s the—peck of—pickled—pepper—Peter—Piper—*picked.*’ Picked go out ! ” Afterwards Miss Robin varied the legend of “ Peter Piper ” with a French one, which, as far as I can recollect, ran as follows :—“ Une Poule sur un mur, qui picotait du pain dur, picoté, picota, lève ta queue et puis t’en va, par ce petit chemin là et non pas

par celui-là," which was pronounced for the sake of the rhythm,

2

" U-ne Pou-le sur un mur
 Qui pi-co-tait du pain dur,
 Pi-co-té, pi-co-ta,
 Lève ta queue et puis t'en va.
 Par ce pe-tit che-min là
 Et non pas par ce-lui-là."

By this process there was very little delay ; two children were always choosing inside the ring, and a third generally waiting to choose ; and directly they had got their things they were sent out of the ring into the next room, where they met and compared notes, whilst the game went on merrily round the Christmas-tree, and the ring grew smaller and smaller.

When all had chosen, the tree still looked tolerably full, for it was a very large tall tree, and thoroughly furnished all over, and so we all had to form again. In this way, each child was assured of getting at least two things, and then began what I may call the spoiling of the tree. This was the best fun. All the children were to gather round Mrs. Martin, Sophia, and Miss Robin at the tree,

and ask for what they liked and get what they could. Mabel cunningly began with Mrs. Martin ; I watched her ; I was so busy watching her I didn't get as much as I wanted for Pet, who would hardly ask at all, and got pushed away several times in the general scramble.

Mabel kept close to stout Mrs. Martin, and made a regular serious business to accumulate and hide away as much as possible. On these occasions there is a great deal in catching a person's eye ; fat people in a crowd and a noise get sooner bewildered and yield sooner to importunity and decision than others, so Mabel stuck to Mrs. Martin and regularly victimised her.

“What's that, Mrs. Martin ? that thing with bonbon baskets and the scent bottle — how pretty !”

“Where, my dear ?”

“There,” and Mabel pulled her to the branch and pointed to an expensive scent-case imbedded in the richest bonbons.

“How I should like to have it !” and snip went

poor Mrs. Martin's scissors, whilst the trophy fell into Mabel's hands. She had actually got a large bag under her petticoat—a sort of extra pocket—into this she slipped everything and returned empty handed.

“Mrs. Martin,” I heard her presently say, “Annie Douglass was promised that wax cupid—can you reach it down?”

Now Annie Douglass was in the next room, and I don't believe she had ever been promised the wax cupid, but Mrs. Martin again did as she was told, and snip went the wax cupid into Mabel's hands ; I need not say it never reached Annie Douglass.

“Oh, how curious! Oh, Mrs. Martin! look here, how very curious—I should so like just to look at it nearer; I'm sure Amy Marsden would like that darling sugar lamb in the flower-basket.”

“Very well, my dear, wait one moment,” and



presently "snip" went the sugar lamb into Mabel's capacious pocket. I saw her take two large crackers off the tree herself, pretending to gather them for some other children; she took all the good sugar plums with *liqueur* in them away from the little children and gave them nasty hard things, much smaller.

"Look here, dear," she would say, "these are so much nicer; and, you see, they are much prettier; would you like to change?" And the poor little things were thus cheated out of their best sugar-plums. And, to crown all, I heard Mrs. Martin saying to Miss Robin,

"What a nice child that little Mabel Morrison is; she seemed entirely bent upon getting things for the other children! I saw her giving her sugar-plums away right and left."

"In exchange, probably," said nice Miss Robin, who was twice as sharp as Mrs. Martin, and already understood Miss Mabel. "By the way, did you think of asking how much Mabel Morrison had in her pocket?" she added with a little

suppressed smile ; but Mrs. Martin was here torn away by an eager crowd. Mabel had vanished—she was in the next room engaged in what she called “*exchanging*.” I called it “cheating.”

As for poor Rob, she had not only made him get a lot out of Sophia Marsden, who was rather weak and yielding to every one who asked for anything, but my intelligent sister had literally deprived Rob of everything that he had got for himself or had had given him, down to a magnifying glass, which was the only thing on the tree which he had set his heart upon having.

“Christmas-trees, you know,” said the philosophic Rob, “are not much good except for the the little children ; sometimes there’s a good thing on them like a magnifier, but then you can get that at a shop, or get it given you without a Christmas tree !”

I didn’t think this much to the point. I was disgusted with Mabel, but I had not been always happy in my attempts to expose her on other occasions ; she was more than my match, and I should

probably get myself into a scrape, so I thought it best to let her alone.

I had a memory though, and so determined to wait my time and try and enjoy myself with Pet.

I went back to the room where the Christmas-tree was still the centre of attraction, when I caught sight of little Annie Douglass crying in a corner ;



Pet was with her, with her arms round her, her mass of bright cloudy frizzled hair almost hiding the little dark-faced creature in distress. Poor Annie had found out

too late that the bright-coloured sugar plums given her by Mabel were so hard that she could not eat them. Mabel had also exchanged dolls with her, and she had discovered that both her new doll's legs were broken, and held together only by its trousers, whilst one of the arms was out of the socket ; a cracker she had got in exchange for a

sugar butterfly was wet and would not go off, and (oh, for shame !) even the bonbon had been extracted from the cracker.

When she took her things back to Mabel, Mabel only burst out laughing, and said, "How was I to know ? you needn't have exchanged."

So poor Annie came away crying, and met dear Pet, who consoled her and gave her half her own sugar-plums and a sugar-swan, seeing how matters stood.

"It's Mabel," I cried. "I saw her—nasty—hor—" but remembering what those words had once cost me, I checked myself, and not feeling prepared or inclined for war, I pulled Pet and said, "Come along, bring Annie to Miss Robin ; we'll take her and tell her she's lost her things, and Miss Robin will give her some more."

Miss Robin was now left alone at the tree with a few children round her. She was the kindest governess I ever knew ; she was nice and pretty, and good natured, and always had a smile for every one, and all the children loved her ; but she

could look very grave too. She never got in a passion like Mrs. Martin, or spoke loud, but every one minded her directly ; she was never flustered or in a hurry, or unfair to any of us, but she seemed to understand us at once, and she gave the presents away better than any one that night. Stout Mrs. Martin got hot and flurried, and gave a dozen things to one or two and nothing to the rest. As for Sophia, she was really too young to give the presents, and got imposed on by all the boys, who kept offering to reach things for her, and then running off with the spoils. But Miss Robin was quick and dexterous, and gave to each child the very thing it wanted ; how she managed I don't know ; I suppose she knew the children best, and remembered what each liked.

“ Fanny, this will do for your doll's house ! ” she would say, handing over a charming little looking-glass and toilet-table ; or, “ Edward, you have not got such a top as this—a new spring top ! ” Or, “ You wanted a wax doll dressed in blue, didn't you, dear ? you must take great care of this

one, Emily." Or—and this is the remark I liked best—"Mabel Morrison, I think you have had quite enough; you may go into the next room, and don't ask for anything more." And Mabel, who had exhausted Mrs. Martin, and already imposed on Sophia, retired at once, after her vain attempt upon the penetrating little governess. She had met with her match, and slunk away without a word, to try her luck with some of the younger boys, who, I am sorry to say, fell an easy prey to her.

We came up just in time to hear Miss Robin's rebuke—

"Please," says Pet, "Annie wants something."

"Mabel has taken her things away," I added; "she's exchanged them, I mean, leaving Annie worse ones."

I didn't choose to abuse Mabel more, as I wasn't intimate enough with Miss Robin, so I simply bore my testimony.

Miss Robin looked at both of us, and then looked at little Annie's half-dry eyes and empty hands,

and seemed quite satisfied. "Here, my love," she said, kissing her kindly (she was a duck, Miss Robin was), "here's a larger cracker with all sorts of things inside it, and here's a box of china tea-things, and here's another doll that's not broken. And mind you don't part with them, or exchange with anybody again; mind, if you exchange you must look carefully first, or you may be disappointed."

So little Annie dried her tears, and Pet and I not unreasonably prided ourselves on having done a good work. At this point Miss Robin was called away into the next room. The tree was now almost stripped, and only a few children were hanging round it. Suddenly we heard a great commotion.

"The tree's on fire!—the tree's on fire!"

shouted a number of voices all at once. Tom Robinson and Harry Martin rushed up, and began flapping and blowing to put the flames out. Two candles had caught the branches high up, and at last Harry, not being able to reach,

had climbed up on the great pot in which stood the tree, and began foolishly shaking the stem; the candles, of course, began to tumble about, the flames increased, and as Miss Robin rushed up with a crowd of children after her, the blazing mass reeled and fell over on Harry, scalding several of the children with the wax, and setting fire to Miss Robin's muslin dress, which was happily extinguished almost immediately; not so, however, Fanny Martin, who was struck by the stem of the tree, knocked down and badly burnt. Many of the children who had been present at the luckless chemical lecture, rushed away at the first alarm, but the room nevertheless presented a scene of wild confusion. Rob, who had run for water, now entered with a large jug, and succeeded in putting out the burning tree. No one was much hurt, with the exception of poor little Fanny, who was carried up to bed very much bruised, and in a piteous state; the drawing-room carpet was spoilt, several dresses were torn and burnt and stained, and Master Harry the source of half the mischief, got

a great scar over his forehead, and a large hole in his new jacket. However, we all made the best of it, and were now directed to gather together all our presents and go downstairs into the dining-room. We did so; but, I am sorry to say, the troubles of the evening were not over. I think we were tired; at all events, many of us were cross, and as there was nothing to do but to compare our various playthings, we soon began to covet what did not belong to us. The two Douglass boys got into a regular fight about a gun. I myself had a difference with Harry Martin who had given me a knife that wouldn't cut in exchange for a pen and pencil all in one. Mabel, at a late hour, tried to deprive Pet of a very pretty bead necklace, but as I was close by she found me one too many for her. She then went off to poor Amy Marsden—the gentlest and most soft-hearted girl, as I then thought her—and made her perfectly miserable by saying, “Oh! I think you have got the best things; how did you manage? I would have given something for that brooch. I suppose your sister

favoured you," until poor Amy began to cry with vexation, and at last actually offered Mabel the brooch, which that business-like person quietly took without even "a thank-you," and slipped into her great pocket.

I don't know how it happened, but, before we all parted, most of the little ones were crying; some had eaten too many sweets; some had been robbed by Mabel, and cheated by the big boys; the elder ones were generally dissatisfied; they all wanted each other's things. I have always found that what belongs to some one else always seems better than what happens to belong to us, and yet the instant we change we are more discontented than ever. No wonder when Mrs. Martin and Miss Robin, who had been upstairs looking after the unfortunate tree, entered the dining-room, they were somewhat surprised to hear so many angry voices and to see so many glum faces. "Where's the drawing-room fireworks," says Tom Robinson; "and where," inquired Rob politely, "is the red fire and green fire?"

“We’ve had quite enough of fire to-night, I think,” says Mrs. Martin, not looking over pleased; “you don’t seem very happy, children.”

“I think,” said Miss Robin, addressing Mrs. Martin, “I think the children are tired; you see they ought to have had games after the tree, but the misfortune that happened took me away, and they have got a little tiresome, as children will if they are left to themselves.”

There was nothing much more to be done. Several carriages had arrived, and when Miss Robin said,

“I think, dears, you had better get on your things; it is time for my children to go to bed,” I for one was not sorry.

The ill-luck and unhappy consequences of that Christmas-tree were felt in many homes for weeks afterwards. Several of the children were ill the next morning from eating too many sugar things; others were bruised, and one or two burnt by the fall of the tree; several dainty dresses were soiled and torn. When the children met, the

toys they had got from the Christmas-tree were a source of quarrelling rather than pleasure, and many old disputes were revived. The jealousy and ill-feeling which Mabel's conduct created amongst her play-fellows on that night, lasted for weeks and weeks. Altogether, although the entertainment had been unusually good, the consequences had been unusually bad; and on one occasion when one of the eldest Douglass boys was urging upon his mamma to have a similar entertainment, and invite all the young people round, the answer he got was, "My dear boy, how can you think of such a thing? Remember the Martins' Christmas-tree."





Chapter 8.

THE HERON'S NEST.



BIRDS'-NESTING *may* be cruel," says Papa in answer to Mama, who asked if we ought to go birds'-nesting. "The young birds ought not to be taken. They would usually only die, although with great care blackbirds and thrushes may be raised."

"Yes; but isn't it very cruel to take the eggs?"

“ Well, my dear,” says Papa smiling, “ you take the poor hen’s eggs every morning ; and when you go to the nest to drive the hen off the egg she has just laid, she pecks and flaps about and does not seem to like it, but you give her a handful of barley, and she soon forgets her troubles, and next day she lays another egg, and so on.”*

“ Oh ! but that’s different,” says Mama.

“ Well, I don’t see what the difference is. The blackbird doesn’t like you to take her eggs out of her nest, nor more does the hen ; but if you take one or even two from the blackbird’s four eggs, the bird will return and lay two more, and hatch them, and no one will be the worse, and you will have got the eggs. If Ben is really making a collection of the birds’ eggs in this county, I don’t see any harm in it.

“ Only, mind Ben,” added Mama, “ you are never to take the nest, or the young birds, or

* Mr. George Rooper’s admirable book for all sportsmen, boys, and lovers of animals, ‘ Flood, Field, and Forest,’ has supplied me with the incident of the “ Heron’s Nest ” and other facts, which I have used freely by his kind permission.

more than two eggs at the outside, and you mustn't tumble the nest about or frighten the poor birds more than you can help, or they will leave the nest in their terror and never come back again."

After this I went out and found Joe in the garden. Joe knew a lot about birds, but he had one fault; he would take the nests and kill the young birds; he declared they ate the fruit, and, worse still, the buds and blossoms before even the fruit came. I was having a regular argument with him, and he was just saying in a self-satisfied way,

"It's all very well, Master Ben, but they eats the fruit, and they eats the blossoms; look at that cherry-tree, they've nigh stript it. If I hadn't frightened them with my gun—"

"Are you quite sure, Joe," said my father, coming down the kitchen-garden just in time to overhear these sentiments, which I confess had very nearly silenced me. "Are you quite sure the birds are such enemies of your fruit, Joe?"

"Well, Sir, leastways they seem so. I've seed 'em a pecking the fruit and stripping the blossoms!"

“ Well, I admit they eat a little fruit, no doubt ; but then, unless they were kept alive to eat the grubs too, the grubs would eat all the fruit ; you complain of the grubs, don't you, Joe ? ”

“ Worse and worse,” says Joe ; “ but still the birds eat more fruit than the grubs, and then look at the blossoms of the fruit-trees ! ” My father picked an apparently healthy looking half-opened cherry bud, and said,

“ Look here, Joe, this is the tree they're so fond of, isn't it ? ”

“ Yes, Sir, they settled down on that tree yesterday, and I was only just in time to save a few of the buds.”

“ You might have spared yourself the trouble,” said my father, as he picked a bud open, and disclosed a tiny grub in the centre of it.

“ There, Joe ! that's what the birds were after ; the birds know more about the grubs than you or I, and look much sharper after them. I warrant you that every bud on this tree is condemned, and you may let the birds have their meal ; they are only

anticipating the decision of time, and, besides, they are killing the grubs for you. Leave the birds alone, my good friend, don't take their nests; they will be shot quite fast enough, and the kites and hawks and reckless birds'-nesters will do the rest without your wasting your valuable time over them. The small birds are your best friends; if you will occupy yourself diligently in digging up plenty of grubs, the birds will eat them fast enough for you; and the more grubs you get them, the less fruit they will take."

Joe felt that he had got a rebuke along with a lesson this time, for he was not so fond of digging as of watching for a hawk or bagging a lot of sparrows and finches, which he said were very good in pies. He resumed his work silently, merely remarking,

"I don't think, Sir, that all the trees which is robbed by them finches is blighted."

"Depend upon it," said my father, "they are, Joe; and next time, before you fire, you had better examine a blossom or two for yourself."

It was most splendid May weather. The birds were building all about our garden. I knew every nest in it. There were four sparrows' (hedge-sparrows) nests, deeply imbedded in the hedges, darling little nests lined with soft wool and horse-hair, with little blue eggs in them—a greenish blue, something like the green leaves in the shade where they lay. Then there was a chaffinch's nest—almost certain to be one in every other nice snug fir-tree at the bottom of our garden,—little grey white eggs spotted with red, and stained as it were with tiny brown threads, not unlike in colour to the decayed brown fir spikes all about them in the undergrowth. Then, there was a large soft wren's nest, with a dozen tiny eggs, one mass of wool and fluff and fine hair (I think it must have come out of some lady's comb), and quantities of farmyard feathers at the mouth ; such a snug nest inside our arbour. There was another wren's nest, where do you think ? In our old pump near the pond, which had been out of order for years ; we saw the tiny Jenny wren fly into the spout, and that is how we discovered the

nest. Joe certainly did know a good deal about nests, though he was wrong about the birds eating all the fruit; but then was there ever a gardener who could be persuaded that small birds were his benefactors? However, Joe pointed out a number of things to me I never should have noticed by myself. A walk with Joe was always a treat to me.

“There’s a wonderful difference in nests, Master Ben; when you know a little about nests, you can generally tell what sort of birds lives in them. Look here, now, in the middle of this furze bush there’s a tit’s nest—lots of feathers, all fluff,” and he opened the prickly bush for me to peep in. “Same way with the Jenny wrens; you never see a tit’s or a wren’s without feathers, and you never see a warbler’s with any feathers about ’un at all. Just get over this hedge, Master Ben; I’ll lift you over. In this here little wood close by a little stream, in a bramble tree, there’s a blackbird’s nest.” He took my hand and we brushed through. “Now,” he said, “there’s not a feather or bit of

wool about that nest; all roots, fibres, hay, that sort of thing." We went on a little further till we came to a wild apple-tree. "There's a thrush's nest up there, Sir; the old un's off, climb up and look in. There's a lovely songster, but her nest's got no soft lining at all, a smooth paste made with cowdung, hard and smooth inside like a cup, ah! and a clean cup too. The missel-thrush is different again; always chooses a fork of a tree to build in, not near so neat as some of the small birds in her work. The little 'uns, tits and finches, do their work beautiful, but the missel-thrush is bound to leave an untidy bit o' wool hanging over the side of the nest. There's many boys don't know that, and never climbs up to take the nest, when they sees that bit of wool, because they think its been took; but you'll know better, Master Ben. The little 'uns is most ways more careful and particular than the big 'uns, though the nightingale is a slovenly bird, rakes a lot of leaves together and sits on 'em. That's about all; but then look at the little swallow—there's a architect for you!

The poor little swallows have got thin soft beaks and tender bodies, and that's why, when they've built their little mud huts, them vile house-sparrows comes with their hard thick beaks and their heavy clumsy carcasses, and kicks the poor little foreign chaps out and gets into their nestes. Regular John Bulls, Master Ben, them house-sparrows are, regular John Bulls; and the swallows can do no more agin them than the French Mounseers can against the Britishers! Did you ever see a dido-hopper—some calls them grebe? well, she goes down to the bottom of the pond for every bit of that weed used for lining her nest. Then look at rooks, always slovenly they are; they don't care to have their beds properly made, regular shake-downs in more senses than one, for the young rooks often tumble out. Now, the carrion crow, he's a tidy fowl, although you'd say he was first cousin or special undertaker to the rook; but them birds builds good nestes, smooth inside with cowdung, and well-bound together with horse-hair. The swan's a free-and-easy one if you like, sits on a

island mostways close to the water, and catches the bits of anything that floats by. And the cuckoo's a regular bad 'un, what never builds no nesty at all, turns out the hedge-sparrows mostly, and lays a great fat egg in their nestes—not but what the egg ain't small enough for the size of the cuckoo—and then finds its perfeSSIONal engagements too pressing to allow of it to sit and hatch its own egg, so flies away and poor Mrs. Sparrow comes back, fancies she must have laid an uncommon big egg, or else hers have growed and changed colour, and sits down to hatch a monster of iniquity with a large open mouth, what she will never be able to fill, and what'll end by eating her out of house and home. Birds is queer, Master Ben. La! I've watched and watched 'em for hours, and I'm never tired of watching them. You likes the eggs, don't you? I took a kestrel hawk's the other day; I can let you have one of the eggs. I've promised the others."

I was delighted; I jumped for joy; I seized Joe's horny hand and shook it, and promised I'd

give him ever so much tobacco. I enjoyed a talk with Joe, for I always got a lot out of him. I let him ramble on and tell me all sorts of things, especially about birds.

My collection of eggs was getting quite important. I had invented a way of blowing them which astonished Joe himself. When Joe blew an egg he used to knock great holes in it, and blow out the yolk and white with one puff; but then in my opinion the eggs were spoiled. So I used always to say,

“Don’t blow them, Joe; bring them to me, I’ll blow them for myself.”

My plan was to make a tiny hole at each side, just large enough for a pin, and quite round, and then blow gently, and suck carefully, and blow and suck sometimes for a whole hour; but then the egg looked as good as new, and it did get quite empty, only you couldn’t see the holes, especially if they were made in the middle of two black or brown spots. Joe wouldn’t at first believe my eggs were blown at all, until he felt the weight and held them

up to the light; there could be no doubt about it then. Some people boil the egg, but that is not nearly so good, because the inside then rots in a few months, and turns the colour of the shell.

About a mile from our house, across two or three ploughed fields, there was a broad sheet of water, formerly the reservoir of an old canal. It was all planted round with firs and pines, and on one side there was a delightful wood that stretched away for over a mile, and ended in another mile of brushwood and covers for game. My papa knew the gentleman to whom this paradise of boys belonged, and we used on rare occasions to be allowed to fish in a punt on the lake or roam the woods in search of nuts and blackberries in autumn, and birds' eggs in spring.

Ah, what a delightful morning that was towards the end of May! We had made up a party. Joe was to be the pioneer. Mabel, Pet, Rob, the Martin boys, and myself, we were all to go in search of birds' nests. I don't think I slept much the night before; then about four o'clock it began to

get light. We were not to start till seven. I was up long before Mabel, arranging my eggs and thinking what eggs I most wanted to complete my set. "Gold-crested wren! of course," I cried, as I looked at my common wren's eggs, "they'll be smaller still, about the size of sugar-plums!"

"A nightingale's egg; I wonder what colour that is? Another wood-pigeon's, that's white, I think! Then I ought to have a swan's egg, just for the sake of contrast. The other day when Joe brought us a swan's egg, I wish I had thought of it for my collection, but Mabel wanted it boiled for tea, and we all tried to eat it but it was too much for us. I remember the yolk was a much paler yellow than hen's eggs, and not so nice either. I wonder why crocodiles lay eggs, and ants and spiders, and moths and emus." So I went on speculating, and the sun rose higher and higher. I threw the window open; there was a rush from the ivy bushes close to the window. "Oh, ho!" I said, "I'll just see what's up here!" And leaning out of the window, I plunged my hand into the

thick clustering ivy—"I declare, here's feathers! and—and—here's eggs!—house-sparrow's eggs." I took out two. I had begun birds'-nesting early. I ran into Mabel's room. "Mabel! Mabel!" I cried, as I shook her rather roughly, "the birds'-nesting's begun; wake up, here's two eggs." She turned, sleepily and rather crossly.

"Let me alone!" she grumbled with a yawn.

"Wake up!" I said, holding the eggs before her.

"Where did they come from?" she asked, raising herself.

"Outside the nursery window," I said.

"Then," she said, wide awake now, "they belong to the eldest, of course; I'll put them in my work-box. You can leave them here for me; I want to see them whilst I dress!"

She had settled everything again. It really was very trying, but to have Mabel in one of her mischievous moods all day would be more trying, and then I didn't really want the eggs; I had plenty of that kind, and then—well, I must confess, that some-

how Mabel had a sort of authority over me—I was a little afraid of her ; and when she ordered me about, I was generally obliged to obey her. I was much weaker and less decided than she was, and then she was the eldest, certainly ; in fact, I have noticed that, rightly or wrongly, the weak, the undecided, and the younger ones generally get domineered over by the grasping, covetous elder ones. So I left the eggs with Mabel. I was in far too high spirits to be easily upset, and ran back to see what nurse was about, and hurry her with breakfast.

We were all to meet at the first stile not a minute later than half-past seven o'clock.

It was a glorious morning ; the May was out thick, and the dew-drops were sparkling in the laburnum trees ; the grass was drenched with the heavy dew, but the sun was rapidly steaming everything dry.

Joe was armed with a long stick. I had my favourite hooked cherry-stone stick to bend the branches with, and Mabel carried a large basket. I caught her putting on her large bag of a pocket

under her flannel petticoat; I hated that bag, it had engulfed so much of my property, and other people's, too; nothing ever seemed to come out of it that once went in; it was a kind of bottomless well. I cut a hole in it one day as I found it lying about; the next day Mabel dropped all sorts of things about wherever she went, and I picked them up. I couldn't help letting it out, though. I never could keep a secret, and wasn't she in a rage, just! Well, we arrived first at the stile. "Here comes Pet!" I cried, as she came tearing down the road, bursting with fun. Rob came on more slowly; he had got a large bottle for frog's spawn, and a large box for gum, chrysalises and caterpillars and ants' eggs.

"You know," he said, "you must watch these things, and see what they do; one turns into one thing, and one into another. Now—"

"Don't stand there lecturing," I cried; "we shall waste all the time," and so saying I lugged Pet to the gate and bundled her romping over the stile, and we both rushed off down a path through

the first field, leaving Mabel and Rob and Joe to wait for the Martin boys by themselves.

When we got to the end of the first field, I think I heard Joe holloa after us, and as we were both pretty well out of breath, I climbed up on a gate and lugged Pet up by my side, and there we sat; overhead hung a great hawk, hovering quite still; presently, with a great swoop, he pounced down on the other side of the hedge. "He's got something," and I sprang down and raced along the hedge, but the hawk was up and away long before I reached him, and I was only in time to see a few feathers floating down from some poor little bird that had been carried off. I ran back to Pet, and we saw in the distance Joe and the rest coming along. The Martin boys were with them. "Come along," I said, and I pulled Pet down, and off we ran hand-in-hand, determined not to be overtaken by the rest until we had reached the brink of the great water.

Just before we came to the second gate, a big hare got up nearly under our feet from a ditch and

started off. I took up a stone and nearly hit it, but it was off,—no use running after it; a little further on we came on a pheasant, and I ran after it with Pet. I thought it must be wounded, as it ran for some way without flying, but just as I thought we were going to overtake it—flap, flap, and off it went over the hedge with a clumsy flight, and I got a splendid throw at it, but I didn't hit it. Never hit a bird in my life, although I spent hours in the kitchen-garden aiming at them. I have sometimes caught a wren, and once I caught a gold-crested wren in a thin hedge, by throwing a clump of loose dry earth at the hedge—the shock of it stunned the bird for a minute without hurting it, and I have then picked it up. Uncle Sam told me that in Brazil, where there are humming-birds in the woods, he has come upon them sitting all of a row on a branch or twig, and with one stroke of his walking-stick, he has shaken the twig and all the humming birds would fall off stunned and ready to be picked up by the dozen. We had a lovely glass case full of stuffed humming-birds in

our drawing-room which uncle Sam brought home and gave to our mamma.

“Oh!” cries Pet, “isn’t it jolly?” and she clapped her hands with glee as she stood at last on the brink of the beautiful clear lake, and looked over the shining smooth water to where there was a little island for the ducks and swans to build in. A couple of ducks rose at the noise and flew off with loud “quacks.”

“There, you see, you’ve frightened them; you mustn’t make such a noise; we must get along quietly through these firs on the bank, and see where the birds fly out; you musn’t startle them before we begin to hunt.”

“Let me startle them whilst you hunt,” said Pet.

“You must do what you’re told, or you’ll spoil it. Here comes Joe and the Martin boys,” who were talking very loud.

“They’ll frighten all the birdses, Master Ben; I’ve told ’em so,” said Joe.

“I say, don’t make such a noise!”

“Tally-ho!” cries Harry.

“Harry! there they go!”

Two blackbirds flew out close by, and I was too excited to attend to Harry further. I was glad to see that he and his brother were already off on their own affairs; their idea was to find partridge nests and steal the eggs. Of course, we were forbidden to do this, but they were off to the brushwood at the other end of the plantation, so I knew what they were after; and I confess I had a great wish for a partridge's egg for my collection, so I wasn't sorry, besides they frightened the small birds, and interfered with our more cautious game.

I crept into the bramble bush from whence the blackbirds had just flown, and Pet, who tried to follow, got stuck and scratched; her clothes having naturally caught. There was the nest—a large black nest, low down, imbedded in bramble thorns. I took two eggs out, green, muddy eggs, freckled with brown, and handed them to Pet; as I came back I extricated her, and found Mabel preparing her voracious bag.

“No, Mabel; they must all go into Joe's basket,

and we shall divide afterwards, you know—that's the rule," I said decidedly, borrowing a leaf out of Mabel's own book. I had just made up the rule myself; it was quite as good as most of Mabel's, and this time she gave in.

"Look! look! Master Ben," cried Joe; "see that brown bird creeping along the ground—she's off!"

"What is it?"

"Nightingale!" says Joe. "They builds on the ground; got brown eggs; t'other birds builds in the bushes, and have got green and speckled eggs. Just you stop still a minute." And we all held our breath with excitement as Joe parted some low bushes and came upon a heap of dead leaves. Joe had a wonderful eye for a nest; there wasn't a bird that could outwit him; he knew all their ways.

"I told you so," says Joe, and he drew forth from the clump of brown leaves two brown eggs. "You was wanting them, Master Ben."

"Oh! what funny, ugly eggs!" says Pet. "I thought nightingale's eggs would have been red and blue, and all sorts of beautiful colours!"

“Yes, Miss Ethel (that was Pet’s real name), but look at the bird, Miss; he’s got a sweet voice, but an ugly brown coat, and the eggs ain’t any handsomer. Look at the plumes of the peacock, but he don’t sing. Well, you can’t tell what a bird’s voice is like by the eggs or the feathers, no more can’t you tell what the eggs or the feathers is like from the bird’s voice. Them things is all arranged otherways, Miss Ethel.”

“Otherways,” was a favourite word with Joe; he used it in all sorts of senses, generally when he could not quite explain what he meant. *alt*

“There’s a power of craft about birds, Miss. You needn’t look in them thick bushes; they never builds exactly where you think their nestes is, and they never flies out straight, except when startled. Where their nestes is, they goes a little way and then flies out; it’s an instinct, and many of them seems to know what we’re thinking of, and what we means to do with ’em, and has all sorts of ways of putting of us off; and how they gets their wisdom no one can’t tell, and otherways—”

Whilst this homily was going on, Rob was busily collecting gum and sticking stuff from the bark of some fir-trees.

“It’s bitter,” he said thoughtfully; “and apple-tree gum isn’t. There must be something in the fir-gum that’s not in the apple and pear gum. I’ll try how it burns when I get home.”

At this moment I spied what looked like a tiny little bit of puff ball touched with a bit of gold leaf, which flashed in the sun, as the little winged dot tumbled about from spray to spray, and made little flittings from one fir-branch to another. It really did not look much bigger than a very large bumble-bee. It was a golden-crested wren. It seemed hardly frightened at us; perhaps it was so small, and we were comparatively so big that it really had hardly noticed us. Perhaps, when flying with all its might, it made so little way in comparison with other birds; at any rate, it did not seem to fear us, and we stood still and watched it tumbling and flitting.

“He’s got a nest not far off—a great big woolly

nest full of soft feathers, with a lot of tiny eggs, Master Ben. You wants them eggs, don't you?" says Joe with his peculiar chuckle.

We all began to hunt and peer about, but Joe kept watching the bird and let us hunt. Mabel was by this time engrossed with the gum; she had got some bits into her bag already, and for days afterwards everything she put into that bag stuck in the remains of the gum. Served her right!

Pet and I were treading on tip-toe and scratching ourselves with the fir-trees in attempts to get our heads in and look up the trunks; the nests were usually close to the trunk, and not far from the top. I found a chaffinch's nest in this way; and with inconceivable anguish I helped Pet up through the thick branches, until she peeped in and took out two eggs for herself, both of which she smashed before I could get her down. She scratched her nose, she tore her petticoat, she caught her thick bushy hair, she nearly sprained her foot, she bruised her arm, she hurt her fingers, her eyes were blinded with the dust and old rot, and when I at

last pulled her down with the smashed eggs she sank upon the soft grass underneath the tree, half laughing, half crying, and quite bewildered with her exertions.

“Girls can’t climb,” I said in a patronizing way.

“Yes, I can climb,” says Pet; “if only I had not these clothes on, I could climb beautifully. I don’t see why girls shouldn’t be dressed more like boys, and get about quite as fast. I can skip and ride, and jump and run, quite as well as you, and I could climb if it wasn’t for my petticoats.”

“What a mess you are in!”

“Never mind, they’re all old things. Nurse said I should get rumped, so it don’t matter—but the eggs!—they’re broken. Oh! I’m so sorry.”

“I’ve got lots of them; it don’t matter.”

“Brush me, Ben! Oh, look at my stockings, all green! I couldn’t help it, could I? You must say I couldn’t help it, because I couldn’t.”

“You mustn’t get up any more trees, that’s all,” I said, trying to rub the green bark stains off her stockings with my pocket-handkerchief.

Then we both got up and met Joe walking quietly along the path by the water with a large fluffy-looking nest in his hand.

“Oh, Joe, you’ve taken the nest! We’re not to take the nests, you know!”

“It don’t signify,” says Joe, who was not so scrupulous about his relation with the birds as I was.

“It don’t signify; there’s lots of ’em about here leastways, and no one ain’t likely to miss this, for although it’s so big I had a rare job to find it. It’s the golden-crested nest, Master Ben, full of eggs,” and he held it down whilst we both examined it eagerly.

A tiny hole to get in, eight little sugar-plum speckled eggs quite warm, and the inside lined with the softest down, and the outside lined with the softest moss, all bound together in workmanlike style with fine hair.

“Oh, what a love of a nest!” cried Pet; “do let me hold one of the eggs in my hand!”

“Take care you don’t break it, Miss,” said Joe, placing a tiny egg in her outstretched palm; “eggs

is different, some wonderful thin, others as thick as you like. Greenfinches, for instance, are as thin as paper. You touch them and they'll break, and how the bird sits on them is a marvel. Wren's isn't thick, but then the bird's small, you know; there's all sorts of difference even between the smallest bird's eggs and otherways."

The wren's nest was deposited carefully in Joe's basket along with the blackbird's and the nightingale's eggs, and then Joe said,

"Master Ben, did you ever see a heronry?"

"No," says I; "what is it? Is it where the herons, those big birds with long necks and long legs, build?"

"That's it. Well, do you see them tall Scotch firs yonder, one of them is overhanging the water? You come along, and don't make too much noise."

Rob and Mabel came up at this moment. Rob had just bottled some lovely frog's spawn, in a somewhat advanced state; the little black tadpole, in fact, was almost ready to jump out of his shiny covering; but when Mabel and Rob heard of the

heronry, all other ideas fled, and we all followed Joe quickly but silently in the direction of the Scotch firs.

It was a lonely part of the lake, and the water was deeper and clearer there than anywhere else. The fir-trees spread out like cedars at the top; they were large trees, with thin long stems, almost bare till you came to the top, where the branches stretched out dark and thick.

As we approached, a big heron, with outstretched neck and long legs drooping behind, gave several screams and flew away from a branch high up overhanging the water.

"There's a nest there," says Joe.

"Where?" I cried.

"On that flat branch, overhanging the water, there's a lot of sticks and stuff, a flat, ugly-looking heap; can't you see it, it's lying on the branch?"

"I see! I see!" I cried in ecstasy; "we must get it, Joe, we must."

"You can't, Master Ben; it's too high, the branch is too thin, it wouldn't bear my weight,

and I don't think it would bear yours, not even if you could get up."

"Ben," said Mabel, "I particularly want a heron's egg, there's sure to be two you know; you could have one and I could have the other—of course, if you didn't want yours, I could have yours as well as my own."

Her own, indeed! there she was settling everything as usual, and all to her own advantage.

"Oh, Ben!" says Pet, quite frightened, "you mustn't get up, you'd tumble down and then you would be drowned."



But I had flown at the trunk of the Scotch fir, and was in a moment swarming up it. I saw Joe running after me, but before he got to the bottom of the tree, spurred on by the fear of being stopped and by my intense eagerness for the heron's eggs, I was out of his reach. I was a capital climber, and a few jutting pegs, stumps of old branches which would not have

borne Joe, did for me, and helped me up. In vain Joe cried,

“Come down, Master Ben, come down.”

In vain Pet shouted and implored, in vain Rob put down his boxes and his bottle, and pulled a bit of rope out of his pocket and twisted his hands nervously about, and kept saying, “He’ll fall down and be killed! oh, dear me—what a fool Ben is!” I did not heed his prophetic words; little I knew how nearly they were to come true. I was nearly exhausted when I reached the branch, the very branch on which the nest lay. I clutched it wildly at the base with my right hand; there was fortunately a good strong peg just below it; I found another for my left foot just in time to ease the intolerable strain on my muscles; even then it was just a chance that I did not slide all the way down again, like that boy whom I once watched at a fair climbing a greased pole for a leg of mutton, he had nearly got up when his strength failed him, and down he came with a run. I thought of that boy in that awful moment, and making a tremen-

dous effort, I hoisted myself on to the branch and lay for a second or two on my stomach panting, with my head and shoulders down on one side and my legs on the other, much as I have seen the executioner in Punch and Judy, lie on the board with his legs hanging over after Punch has knocked him down.

It was of no use calling to me now, and as I looked down, my head beginning to swim, I saw Joe, Pet, Mabel, and Rob looking up a long way below with various expressions of horror. However, I felt I had broken the back-bone of my task; so I thought at least, little dreaming that my own back-bone was in imminent danger, and with some difficulty I swung myself round and sat astride on the branch, leaning my back against the main trunk of the tree. It was a glorious moment, that breathing space. Beneath me lay the lake, on the bank stood my companions. The branch on which I sat drooped a little with my weight and the weight of the nest and the heavy foliage. I could see into the flat slovenly nest. I could see three

long green eggs lying soft and warm in masses of wool, the outside of the nest was all sticks, and very like a bad rook's nest, only flatter. From my proud position I could also see in the distance the Martin boys—they came running up. I shouted to them and waved my cap. As my strength returned, my spirits rose. I grew wild with excitement.

“If you venture along that branch you'll fall, Master Ben, as safe as my name's Joe?”

He might have shouted to the wind for aught I heeded, and seeing I paid no attention to him, he stripped off his coat and waistcoat, undid his boots, and then stood watching me in silence.

“What are you going to do, Joe!” said Pet.

“Will he really fall?” said Mabel.

“Will this rope be any good?” says Rob.

Joe answered not a word. He was watching me intently. I had laid flat down on the branch, and began slowly and cautiously creeping along towards the nest. The bough began swinging downwards.

I could see nothing but the water through the fir clusters; it looked a long way off, and the sight made me rather dizzy. I looked straight towards the eggs. As I got within reach, crawling with as little motion as possible, and slowly stretching out my right hand for an egg, I nearly lost my balance—crack! Yes, there was just a little crack. I clutched an egg and slipt it into my cap, another



Got into cold water!

I slipt loose into my trousers' pocket. It was a perilous place I know, but where could I put it? my waistcoat was too tight, my jacket was full of marbles and knives, and string and nails. Scarcely had I landed my second egg than the bough gave another crack, and this time I felt it yield a little; there was not a moment to be lost. I shrank back rather suddenly, that was fatal—I felt it was all over.

Crack—CRACK—CRACK! and down through the

air my head went. I remember nothing but a cold plunge.

* * * * *

When I opened my eyes Joe was bending over me. I was wrapt up, Pet was rubbing my hands. I saw every body dimly. I heard voices as if they had been far off. There seemed a crowd round me. I couldn't recall what had happened at first. I was sick and faint, and felt a stinging in my nose. They had been forcing brandy down my throat. My first words I was afterwards told, were, "Eggs!" and Joe, with an instinct of what would revive me, held up one long green egg. It was the one I had put in my cap. It seems to have felt soft inside the cap, which was of seal-skin and well padded. The other egg was of course smashed. The crowd around me consisted of the Martin boys, Joe, Mabel, Rob, and Pet; they all thought I was dead, and even Mabel was crying. Strange to say, Pet, in her excitement, had left off crying, and was rubbing my hands furiously; that's why I noticed her first when I came to my senses.

I afterwards learnt that Joe, the instant I fell, had plunged into the water, and with his eyes fixed on the spot where I sank, had dived beneath me, and brought me up in a dead faint; when he rose, the cap with the egg was just sinking nearer to the shore, and he caught it as he landed with the most wonderful presence of mind.

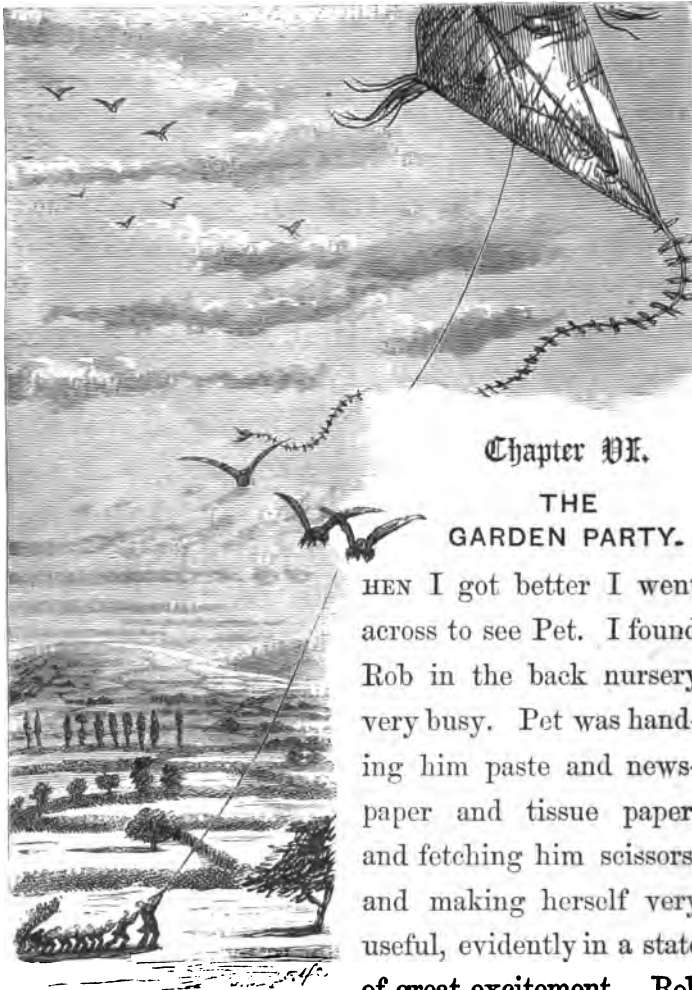
“I’m not hurt, Joe,” I said faintly, and I tried to rise, but immediately fell back with a sharp pain all along my back; the shock of falling on the water, although I fell nearly perpendicularly, had shaken my ribs terribly. When I was undressed there were red bruises all down my back as if I had been soundly beaten. The attempt to rise had brought on a sharp pain in my head, followed by great faintness, and I lay back in Joe’s warm coat in which he had wrapped me, and took no more notice of anybody or anything. The next time I became sensible I was tucked up warm in bed. Pa and Ma were both standing near me, and when I opened my eyes Ma stooped down and kissed me, and said,

“Bless you, my dear boy—what a mercy you are alive!”

Pa looked very grave and anxious, but it wasn't the look I dreaded. He felt my pulse and smoothed my head kindly. He thought probably I had been punished enough for my vagary.

I was not seriously injured, but I was kept in bed for some days. Pet used to come every day to see me, and brought me things. Rob showed me several valuable experiments, and brought me the frog's spawn, now turned into tadpoles — even Mabel was not unkind, and put in no claim for the solitary heron's egg for which I had paid so dearly. (I kept that egg by my bed-side day and night, till I was well enough to blow it.) Altogether, it wasn't very unpleasant being ill, when the pain of the bruises went off; but, alas! my accident put an end to our jovial rambles alone with Joe; and although I begged hard again and again to go birds'-nesting in the plantation, all Papa said was,

“My dear Ben, I should think you, at least, ought to remember the heron's nest!”



Chapter IX.

THE GARDEN PARTY.

WHEN I got better I went across to see Pet. I found Rob in the back nursery very busy. Pet was handing him paste and newspaper and tissue paper, and fetching him scissors, and making herself very useful, evidently in a state of great excitement. Rob

was grave and preoccupied and silent, as he always was when meditating anything very new or striking in the way of experiments.

“What are you about?” I asked.

“Oh!” cried Pet, “he’s going to make a balloon; a real balloon, you know,—not to go up in, but made of tissue paper, and it will really go up itself with wool and spirits of wine; won’t it be fun?”

“It’s a fire-balloon,” says Rob thoughtfully. “The hot air is made by wool and spirits of wine burning underneath it on two stretched wires, you know; and the air within, being thus heated, causes the balloon to rise through the colder air outside. It’s a splendid experiment; but depends on the balloon being made in the right way. The Marsdens are going to have a large garden party, and I’m going to make two or three fire-balloons, in case one shouldn’t go up, you know.”

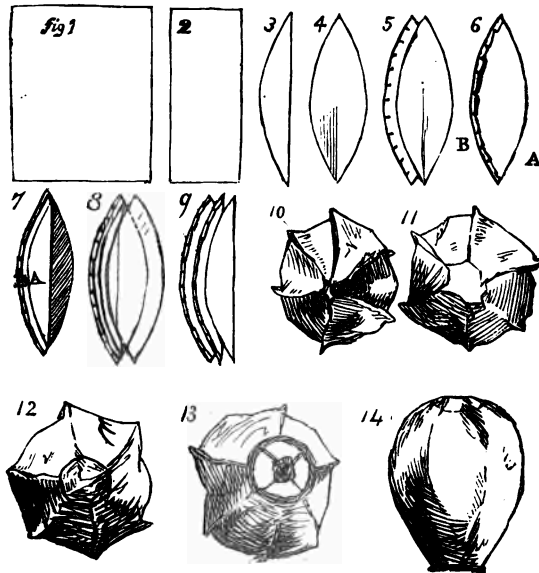
If there was anything in it, which of course I doubted—for science seemed to me, as a rule, a very doubtful and unprofitable business—still.

if these were really balloons that were likely to go up, this seemed an experiment worth making.

“How do you do it?” I said, looking at the sheets of tissue paper, and for the benefit of future Robs and Bens I will just set down here with a few easily understood woodcuts, the different steps in the manufacture of Rob’s balloon as he explained them to me.

“Take six sheets of white tissue paper—the thinnest paper you can get—and lay them even and flat one on the top of the other, (fig. 1.) Then fold the six sheets together once thus, (fig. 2.) Then take a pair of scissors and cut them in a sort of semicircle, (fig. 3.) Then open them, (fig. 4.) Then take two of the sheets and paste them together, slashing the outside one just to make it paste neater, thus, (figs. 5 unpasted and 6 pasted.) Then take hold of the edge A, fold it back as best you can upon sheet B, (fig. 7.) Then take another sheet and lay it flat within edge A, and paste A over it, (fig. 8.) Then take the next edge (fig.

9) and treat it similar to edge A, and so on till all six sheets have been worked in, (fig. 11.) You will then only have two outer edges to paste belonging to the first and the last sheet; paste them



together, and then you will have your balloon made, with a little hole at the top and a bigger hole at the bottom. The great object is to leave

as small a hole as you can at the top; the balloon should look like this at the top, (fig. 10,) and like this at the bottom, (fig. 11.) When you paste you should paste quickly, lightly, but thoroughly, and between each seam that is pasted you should place a piece of newspaper, and paste on that and not on the balloon, or the seams will stick to the balloon. You can hasten the work by holding a hot iron over each seam when finished, which will dry it quickly, and then you can continue without any danger of the wet portions tearing or sticking to the dry ones."

"What do you do with the top hole?" I asked.

"Paste it up; cut a round bit, a little bigger than the hole; take a large ball—football or basin, or something round—get some one to hold it inside, just to flatten out the edges a little; then paste the round piece on the top of the balloon, (fig. 12.) You must manage this as best you can; it's difficult. You can only do it by practice; some do it with the help of any round ball inside. You must get some

one to hold the balloon in a half-inflated state, anyhow—”

“And what do you do with the bottom?” I inquired.

“Ah! that’s it,” says Rob. “You must leave that open.”

“Then all the hot air will get out,” I said.

“No it won’t,” replied the man of science. “The hot air don’t go down; it rises, and pushes the balloon up.”

“Where do you put the wool and the spirits of wine on fire?”

“Sponge will do; sponge or wool, it does not matter which. Well, look, here is the bottom, (fig. 13.) Take a bit of cap wire, or light split cane, make a hoop of it, about the size of the bottom of the balloon, then paste the edges of the bottom over the hoop. When dry, stretch two thin wires across, thus, (fig. 13,) and fasten wool or sponge, E, in the middle. Then your balloon is done (fig. 14); as to how to send it up, we shall see that by-and-by.”

“Don’t believe it will go up,” said I as usual, throwing cold water on Rob’s experiments.

“If all don’t go up one will,” replied the manufacturer with his usual steady and patient zeal. “I have made a big one by pasting two sheets together lengthwise. You must have eight of these sheets; which takes, of course, sixteen pieces of tissue paper to make one big balloon. They go up best; they’re noble, they are. You can have them in colours, of course; alternate pink and white’s best, the green’s and dark red’s are heavier paper, and don’t suit so well. There’s nothing like the plain white tissue paper for going up!”

The party was at the Marsdens’ the day after next. All our usual friends were to be there; all the boys were to bring something new to contribute to the general entertainment. I had got some india-rubber serpent skins which, when blown out, fly right up in the open air, or high over the house. The Martin boys had made between them a big kite, which was to be flown in the neighbouring

field, if there should be wind enough. Tom Robinson had got a boomerang, which I will explain presently, and Rob had got three balloons.

“I hope,” said Harry Martin, “there’ll be lots of wind, and then my kite will go up.”

“I hope,” said Rob, “there’ll be no wind, and then my balloons will go up.”

“My boomerang,” said Tom Robinson, “will go up in any wind.”

“So will my snakes,” said I. “Rob’s balloons are the only things that won’t go up, you’ll see !”

Rob was accustomed to the scoffs of unbelievers, and merely said,

“Yes, you’ll see !”

“What will you bet ?” said Tom, who was always betting and making money, and trying to barter with the other boys. But Tom could get no one to bet against Rob. Somehow, although we jeered at Rob’s science, he had succeeded often enough, and astonished us often enough, to inspire us all with a certain amount of respect ; and we

inwardly believed that the balloons would most likely go up after all. They did with a vengeance, as we shall presently see!

Well, the day came, a fine windy day in June; all that the Martin boys wished, all that Rob dreaded.

We were to be at the Marsdens' about three o'clock; play about till five or six; then, if the wind was favourable, Rob's balloons were to be let off. Then we were to have races, and play about till it got dark; then more refreshment; then fireworks in the garden, provided by Mr. Marsden, assisted by Rob, Tom Robinson, and the gardener (Rob had a peculiar experiment connected with Catherine wheels, which never came off); then more refreshment; then home!

There was a day of pleasure for you! Pet was in ecstasies, Mabel had been mending and enlarging her celebrated bag or pocket all the morning, Rob had been giving the finishing touch to his balloons, I had been blowing out my serpents until I had burst one and made my cheeks ache, Tom had been

practising his boomerang until his right arm was quite stiff, and the Martin boys had been making an interminably long tail for their monster kite.

When we got to the Marsdens' I found lots of people there I did not know, especially some tall, grown-up girls, who walked about with Sophia Marsden in a grand sort of way, and seemed terribly afraid of running about or appearing excited about anything. As for Sophia, I'm quite sure she would have liked a good romp with some of us younger ones, for I met her in a walk with the two Martin boys, each had hold of one hand, and they were tugging her along at a tremendous pace. She was quite out of breath, and pretending not to like it, but she was laughing all the same; and of course she liked it, all girls like running about; she could have got away if she had not liked it. When I came upon them (I was walking with Mabel and Amy Marsden and Sophia), she tore her hands away from the Martin boys, and pretended she had never meant to run or laugh at

all, and she was soon back again with the grown-up's, looking as stiff and dull as any of them. But this wasn't Sophia's nature, for later in the day she had great fun in the hayfield with Tom Robinson, who smothered her with hay, and she pretended not to like that either. What is the use of pretending, I often thought; why, anybody can see through it. If it's a fine day and a nice garden, of course you like to have a good run; and if there's lots of nice hay, any one would like a good roll, and Sophia got it, too, whether she liked it or not.

"Pet," I said, "there's a lot of people here I don't know; you stop with me. I don't care about a lot of new people. Let's go and find out the kitchen-garden!"

"Oh! do you think we can eat any of the fruit?" said Pet, delighted at the idea of such a possibility. "Now, I think it ought to be a sort of rule at great parties, when there's lots of fruit in the kitchen-garden—gooseberries, you know, and raspberries, and currants, and that sort of

thing—for the people asked to be allowed to go and pick some and eat it. Of course they would not take the peaches and plums; only then, the people who invite them might say, ‘Won’t you have a plum, Miss Morrison?’ or, ‘Won’t you have a greengage, Master Ainslie?’ Don’t you think that would be a good plan now, Ben?”

“What’s the use of talking about it?” I said in my matter-of-fact way. “It isn’t the rule here that I know of, though there’s lots of fruit. I say, I just caught sight of the gardener on one side of the raspberry beds, pulling up radishes for tea. I say, there’s William, he’s a friend of Joe’s; if you ask him, Pet, he might let us gather just a few raspberries.” Pet said, “Oh, I don’t like to!” and I confess I myself had some scruples, but we both came up to him.

“How do you do, Miss Ethel?” said William, looking up from his work, and touching his hat most politely.

No one could resist Pet. She slipped her hands,

as usual, into her little white cambric apron pockets, that were all fringed with cherry-coloured ribbon, and, thinking more of the fruit than of William, looked up in his face with a merry little blush, and answered, "Quite well, thank you. Oh!" she said, "isn't it getting hot?" And turning to me she took off her hat, and shook her great mass of bright chestnut hair until it stood up all round her face in a great fleecy cloud. It was not long, but so thick and fine, and what we used to call all frizzled and crinkly. I never saw such hair, except in the pictures of the sleeping beauty, but then hers was all in long curls, and Pet's was short and bushy.

"You'll get the sun on your head, Miss, if you don't keep your hat on," said William, looking at her with such a kind pleasant smile, and at the same time he picked half-a-dozen white raspberries and offered them to her. "Do you like raspberries, Miss?"

"Oh! thank you," said Pet. "How kind of you, William. We were just saying how nice it would

be if we might have some." And she offered me her handful.

I took one.

"Eat them, Pet," I said, with a struggle, "eat them yourself." And I half turned away for fear I should take too many, for she kept on offering them to me. I believe there is not a thing she wouldn't have given to me, or any one else, for the matter of that. How the girls used to rob Pet! Pet used to think it natural somehow that every one else should take whatever they could get; she even made allowance for Mabel's bag, but she never thought it natural to secure advantages for herself—somehow it never occurred to her; but then I think she was always more pleased than the grasping girls if anything came her way. Mabel, for instance, was always grumbling and complaining, and dissatisfied with the treatment she met with, and the presents she got; but the smallest concession or attention, and the most trifling gift, threw Pet into an ecstasy, and when William held out his hand with six fine white raspberries and offered

them to her, I don't think there was a happier girl in the garden than Ethel Ainslie.

"Perhaps," said William, and I fancied he noticed the noble sacrifice I made in refusing to eat half the raspberries, "perhaps Master Ben would like to gather a few for himself and you, Miss, only you must not tell the others, or I should have the kitchen-garden robbed of all the fruit in no time."

This was delightful.

"May I really?" I asked. "Thanks, William, I'll just gather a few," and I plunged into the delightful bushes laden with red and white raspberries, and ate some myself and handed some to Pet, who stood on the path, her face beaming with pleasure. Perhaps it was the heat, perhaps it was Pet, perhaps it was our good humour and getting the thing just when we wanted it, but I certainly never tasted such raspberries. I have often noticed how seldom one gets what one wants just at the right time. Everything nice comes a little too early or a little too late. Sometimes I have been

asked out, and there have been nice sweets and cakes and good things—but then I had no appetite; and then when I got home I was quite hungry, but there was nothing but tea and bread and butter, and such bread and butter! bread and scrape we used to call it. They put on the butter in thick layers, and then scraped off every vestige of it with a knife.

“Don’t trouble yourself,” I said one day to nurse, “don’t trouble yourself to put the butter on, and then you won’t have the trouble of taking it off.”

Nurse looked up rather astonished, but in another moment said,

“Very well, Master Ben; you can eat your bread dry if you like it best.”

“There was what Papa called sarcasm on both sides, but only one side suffered. I used to worry nurse about the bread and scrape, to be sure, but then she deserved it. Next time I said,

“Don’t trouble yourself to take the butter off, I’ll do that for myself.”

She really was shamed into leaving a little more on than usual that time. Sometimes when I got a very scrappy bit, I used to turn it over and over again, and at last ask which was the buttered side. But I forget myself. Here is Pet eating the raspberries, when whirr! whirr! and we both looked up at once. Over our heads came flying a curious flapping crooked thing, something like a wooden sickle, but going round and round in the air, up and down just like a large living bird, and then with a swoop it glided back over the kitchen-garden wall into the flower-garden on the other side. We heard shouts from the boys, and we both ran back to see what it was all about. We saw the children running from all sides, and this looked as if there must be some fun.

There stood Tom Robinson with his boomerang, —looking very proud and consequential—the centre of an admiring group. The boomerang was merely a crooked piece of smooth wood. It was, he told us, used by the savages of Australia and other foreign parts to kill birds with; it is sent spinning

up into the air, where it moves about in a curious way, attracts the big birds who get hit by it, and then it always swoops back to the person who has thrown it. Tom's didn't always come back, but that was because he didn't know how to throw it. We all went home and cut little boomerangs out of common stiff-visiting cards, placed them on our fists and nuted them off into the air.

We found that some which happened to be cut well spun round, flying right into the corner of the room, and came back beautifully, better in fact than Tom's boomerang. This was the shape of our card boomerangs.



“I don't think it's very safe, Robinson!” said Mr. Marsden. But at that moment Tom let fly; we all watched this curious weapon spinning high up in the air, right away from us, when suddenly it turned to come back and swoop—

“Mind! mind! run Amy!” but too late.

Amy saw it coming at her where she stood, she turned to run, but with its spent force it

fell, striking her just above the right ankle. She gave a loud scream, and fell down half in terror, half in pain.

Poor Amy was carried indoors, she couldn't walk; her leg was not broken, but terribly bruised, and it was some days before she could run about again. So there was an end to Tom's boomerang, at least that day.

But the Martin boys were already off to the field with their big kite. Such a kite! the wind was not so high as it had been, but still it was favourable. The kite was ten feet high, made of a light watertight canvas very stiff, so that it could hardly tear. It was built with a tight firm ash back-bone, and a cross-bone, the top being in an angle instead of round; the tail was of immense length, and it was found necessary to tie a silk handkerchief even to that, in order to give the kite ballast and steadiness. There was great excitement, even Sophia and the big girls came along with all the others, and we all stood in a semicircle in a good open part of the field.

Flying this kite was no such easy matter. Mr. Marsden, William, Tom, the Martin boys, had their special parts to play in this difficult and, as it proved, hazardous operation. Rob preferred standing and giving advice. As for me, I was scampering about with Pet, telling every one it wouldn't go up, and in a great state of excitement.

There was quite a large crowd in the field, all the servants had come out to see the big kite.

William now carried the monster very carefully to a favourable spot on a little hillock, the Martin boys carrying the tail after him. Mr. Marsden, Tom, and several other boys behind him, were in readiness to hold the string. The moment had arrived; the kite was with some difficulty held up,—William got on a chair for that purpose—with a mighty flap the monster swayed and knocked him and the chair right over amidst roars of laughter from the assembled spectators, but the kite was off, and swaying fearfully not very far above the crowd; but now the long tail was lifted, the sweeps

grew wider, the kite began to soar upwards nobly, every now and then darting downwards, but still upward bound.

Every one was quite silent. I looked round to see how they were holding the string. What a sight! There was poor Mr. Marsden, his hat off, his coat-tails flying, every muscle of his arms strained, battling with the fierce creature that seemed trying to tear him from the earth and fly away with him; behind him was poor Tom, —he had forgotten to put on thick gloves, his fingers were dreadfully cut with the string; he had whipped out his pocket handkerchief, it was soon covered with blood, but he held on like grim death; he did not dare to leave go, or the kite would have overpowered Mr. Marsden and been off in a moment, string and all. Behind Tom there was a confused mass of boys, all holding on to the string and tumbling over and over it and over and over one another.

But now William and the Martin boys came rushing up. I could restrain myself no longer,

and joined in the fray; by degrees we got the strain distributed, William took poor Tom's place and chose the strongest boys to hang on behind whilst the string was being let out. The kite was now up a good height and more easy to manage, but the strain was fearful; however, it was capital fun, and "Three cheers" rose again and again from the spectators now that all danger seemed over. We sent messages up—bits of paper—which spun along the string; then we put our ears to the string and heard the whistling of the wind a long way off. Then all the boys pulled together like sailors, and Mr. Marsden and William let go for a moment till the boys cried out,

"She's going! she's going! hold hard!" and indeed the kite seemed as the string rose with the boys to be about to fly away, boys and all.

This exercise was found rather too severe to last long; and, after all, when the kite was once up, there was nothing much to do but to look at the kite and to hold the kite. The boys were soon tired of

the one and the girls of the other, and so we left the Martin boys, William, and Mr. Marsden to get the kite down as best they might, and we all went into the next field from which the hay had not yet been lifted, and prepared for a good romp. The kite boys soon joined us. They had not taken the kite down, they had made it fast to a stout oak-tree and left it to pull at its leisure.

Pet and I got into the middle of a nice haycock and burrowed down. We made a splendid nest, no one could see us. We heard Mabel calling, "Ben, Ben," but we took no notice; we were not up in a damp hayrick this time, and Mabel had no business to interfere.

"Pet," I said, "I wish we had some raspberries."

"Oh, dear!" says Pet, lying down with her head nestling low in the hay. "I'm so sleepy. I'm sure I shall go to sleep; have you got a lemon-drop?"

I had just one left, so I took it out and said, "Open your mouth and shut your eyes;" she did both, I popped the lemon drop in, and then I

covered her tightly over with hay leaving only her little head out; there it lay pillowed in a mass of tumbled hair. Whether it was the heat, or whether it was at first only shamming, I do not know, but having shut her eyes and got her lemon-drop, she seemed in no hurry to open them. I was pulling the seed off the hay to make little saw-spikes wherewith to extract single hairs by the root, and I did not for a minute or so notice Pet after I had covered her up, when I heard a deep sigh; I looked round, there was no mistake, "Pet was fast asleep." I didn't wake her; I made a hole on one side of my nest, I crept out, and left her, intending to come back presently and wake her up.

Sophia Marsden was sitting with her circle of "grown-ups" outside a haycock. I inflated one of my serpents, and let fly at the group. There was a scream, and then laughter; the skin had collapsed and fell into Sophia's lap. She whispered something to her companion, and as I approached unsuspectingly enough to reclaim my snake, a light-haired girl of about seventeen seized me

by the shoulders, and Sophia took me by the legs, and they tossed me in a moment on to the top of the haycock and smothered me with hay. I roared out. I abused them. I struggled, but all to no purpose. The girls, who had no doubt been dull enough till I came, had found just the little excitement they wanted.

The more I burrowed to get out, the more I seemed to get lower and lower. I got down to the stumps of the mown grass at last. I am sure one great girl was sitting on the top of me, there was something fearfully dark and weighty above me.

“Don’t let him get out—don’t let him get out,” I heard the girl with light hair scream; and again they piled hay over every aperture where light was dawning, and I moved tortoise like about half choked and smothered with dust and heat. I got one hand free at last; I groped about; I seized hold of something in my desperate state. I am sure it was an ankle. I took hold of it with both hands; I dug my nails in as tight as I could, and pulled furiously. There was a

loud scream, the light-haired girl was punished at last; she fell down, but I did not let go until she had dragged me out of my prison; then seeing that the other girls were preparing to set upon me again, I threw a lot of hay over them and scampered off, singing "cock-a-doodle-doo!" at the top of my voice, but leaving, alas! one of my snakes in the enemies' hands.

Well, we had a lot of wild fun in the hay. Harry Martin had a long pugilistic encounter in a hay-ring with another boy. I was his second and backed him up. They began in fun, but at last the seconds cheered them on. I regret to say that I wanted to see a few blows struck in earnest myself, and I kept bawling out,

"You can't hit him on the nose—you can't hit him on the nose!" till at last Harry delivered what he called a "tap" on his adversary's nose. The nose began, of course, to bleed, and every one seemed delighted, and the combatants would have proceeded to further extremities had not Mr. Marsden come up and stopped the game.

But the boxing over, my thoughts turned to the grown-up girls. I determined to have my revenge upon them. I felt sure that Sophia Marsden, although she looked the quietest of them all, was at the bottom of my maltreatment.



There they were, sitting a long way off, in the same place. Arming myself with two or three tough stems of grass, and stripping the seeds off the tops, I provided myself with those insidious hair extractors which I have alluded to before. Slip one into a head of hair anyhow, twist the stem at the bottom, and you can pull out one or more hairs, inflicting exquisite torture upon the girl. With these thoughts in my mind, I slowly and cautiously approached my group. What strength could not do craft might, I said to myself. When I came within hearing, I shouted, "You've got my snake!"

"Come here and take it then!"

"Sophia, you've got the snake, haven't you?" said one of the girls.

“Promise you won’t toss me in the hay?” I said in a simple and trusting manner.

“Promise you won’t blow the snake at us?” said Sophia.

“I promise!” said I chuckling inwardly.

“Then we promise,” they said, and I advanced towards them in the most confiding manner, hiding my deadly weapons up my arm.

“Come and sit down, Ben,” said Sophia in her sweetest manner; and she made room for me between the light-haired girl, whose ankle I had hurt, and herself. They all seemed very friendly now, perhaps they felt they had been a little too hard on me, and wanted to make it up. I sidled up to Sophia almost affectionately.

“You nearly smothered me,” I said.

“Poor boy!” she said patronizingly; “we didn’t mean to hurt you. Here is your snake.”

“Oh!” I said, “what’s that in your hair?” And I moved quite close and prepared my weapons, as she turned her head a little round for me to see, supposing that I was going to extract some hay-

spider, or one of the innumerable little hay insects that kept hopping about.

In a moment I had two spikes in her long dark tresses. I twisted them hard and ruthlessly, like a dentist, and wrenched out five or six hairs. The whole thing was so unexpected that no one was prepared to seize me, for no one quite knew what had happened. Clutching my lost snake, I sprang up and rushed off, shouting with laughter, and hallooing my favourite war cry, "Cock-a-doodle-doo!"—this time not in defeat but in victory.

The girls recovering themselves rose and pursued me, but at this moment a dreadful spectacle diverted the attention of pursuer and pursued. A young frisky horse had been teased by the boys, broken loose into the hayfield, and came galloping towards us, kicking up its hind legs and neighing. He dashed into a haycock.

For the first time since I had left her, I thought of Pet. Where was she? I looked round. I could not remember in which haycock I had left her. Several were tumbled and many were not.

I had made ours as neat as I could to look like the others outside, so as to elude discovery, and now I could not discover it myself.

The frisky horse, pursued by William and several boys, was rushing and plunging about; first into one clump of hay, then into another.



“Stand off, Master Ben! he’ll kick you!” shouted William; but I was in terror for Pet, and forgot my own danger.

“Pet! Pet!” I shouted wildly. “She’s in one!”—pointing to a haycock—“she’s there!”

“Where?” shouted William.

“I don’t know,” I cried, frantically rushing into one after the other, and shouting “Pet! Pet! Get up! Get out! Quick, quick!”

At last I found myself running side by side with the horse. I was on the wrong side to turn him from the haycocks we were coming to. I heard Pet’s voice cry “Ben!” close by—she was in the very next—the startled horse turned and plunged into the very middle of it, kicking furiously. I plunged after him, and how it happened that we were not both of us killed is to me to this day a mystery. Seizing Pet, I rolled with her out of the haycock on one side, the horse, covering us with hay, plunged out on the other side, and was off. We lay panting with terror for a moment, but safe.

“Oh! Ben,” cried Pet in a flood of tears, “how could you leave me?”

“We’re all right,” I said. “Ain’t you glad you’re not killed?”

This was perhaps the most cheerful as well as the most impressive consideration, and Pet, still clinging to me only half awaked from sleep, listened breathlessly whilst I explained as breathlessly what had happened.

No actual damage was done, the horse cleared the hayfield of children, and was caught in due time by William. And Pet and I became suddenly objects of universal interest, and received the congratulations of every one. I reproached myself bitterly with having left Pet; but no one else knew anything about that, and, after all, as I could not have foreseen the accident, Pet said that I was not actually much to blame, and soon forgave me.

About six o'clock on the smooth, green, shady lawn, close to a tall hedge of laurel, a long table was spread for our tea.

“Doesn't it look nice!” cried Pet, as we both came towards it.

We found Mabel prowling about it by herself. The old nurse was at one end cutting bread and

butter. Mabel sidled up to her in her humble fawning way, which took in people who were not up to her.

“Please, Mrs. Cross,” she began, “can I be of any use to you?”

“No, thank you, my dear,” said the old woman, looking over her spectacles at Mabel rather surprised.

“Oh! please, Mrs. Cross, might I just have one of those little cakes with pink sugar at the top?”

“Just have one!” indeed—that was always Mabel’s phrase. May I *just* do this or have that; or I only *just* went here or there, and only *just* asked for what I wanted, and if they didn’t give it to me, why I only *just* stole it.

“*Just* have everything before any one begins tea,” I bawled out, seeing Mabel’s greediness.

The old nurse looked up again, still more surprised.

“I say, Mrs. Cross, may I just take all the jam, and here’s Pet, she’ll just have all the cream; O-ho! You don’t like that Mabel, do you?—Cock-a-doodle-doo!”

“Go away—go away, children; tea isn’t ready. I can’t have you fussing about me here.”

Mabel had glided away, darting angry looks at me and Pet, and left us talking to the old nurse. I kept my eye on her, and from the bottom of the table I saw her take a cake and slip it into her bag.

“Holloa!” I cried, “she’s taken a cake!”

But Mabel was off like a cat, and the old woman probably did not think it worth while to follow the thief. Afterwards, when I accused my crafty sister of it, she denied it boldly, and called me “A wicked bad boy!”

“Wicked bad girl!” I replied. But the quarrel went no further; there were other things to think of.

It was a merry party. There was such lots to talk about, and such quantities to eat; and Pet and I got plenty of attention, owing to our narrow escape from the kicking horse. Poor Tom Robinson’s hand was tied up, and apparently useless; it had been terribly cut with the kite string; but

where were the owners of the kite, the Martin boys? Tea was half over before they were missed; then one of them came running up, covered with dust, his jacket torn, and bringing with him a doleful tale.

It appears that the kite, left to itself, had pulled and pulled, and had at last pulled itself free and gone off; Harry was just in time to see it break loose. He ran across the field, as he saw it whirl away in the distance. At last it seemed to stop and rise steadily in the air; the string had caught in the branches of a great oak-tree.

Harry climbed the oak-tree, and thoughtlessly began unwinding the string, when with a rush the kite pulled him half through the branches, and went off, leaving him hanging in a very precarious condition, scratched, dusty, and torn. Harry got down as best he could, and was off after the kite. As the wind was sinking, and the string did not catch again, the kite of course fell—a long way off, though, and in falling broke its back bone. This was the sad tale. Harry and his brother

brought the remains of the poor kite, with its tail in a hopeless tangle, and we made room for them at table, and tried to comfort them with jam and cake, of which I am bound to say they both ate enormously.

Rob had been particularly gloomy all the afternoon, but now that the wind had fallen, there was some hope for the fire-balloons, and he brightened up. He was silent, though, and agitated, and could eat no tea, and fidgeted dreadfully. Mabel sat by him, and kept saying, for instance—

“Rob, have some more of these gingerbreads?” and she handed them to him, and put some on his plate, for he hardly noticed her.

“Rob, don’t you want your gingerbreads? If you don’t, you know, I’ll have them; it would be wrong to waste them,” and she swept them off his plate into—into her bag, of course. This went on all through tea.

“Hand some of that over!” I cried out to her more than once; but she appeared not to hear, and people only stared at me, so I left off and followed

her example by securing what I could for Pet and myself.

“I must ask Mrs. Cross, mustn't I?” said Pet dubiously, as I urged her to put a gingerbread into her pocket.

“Oh, all right!” I said, “she won't mind, she's a good-natured old thing.”

So after tea I saw little Pet go up to Mrs. Cross and say, with a certain little blush that seemed to win everybody, “Please, Mrs. Cross, may I take away this nut; one of the boys gave it me?”

“Yes, my dear, certainly you may, and you're a good little girl to ask; there's some as takes and don't deserve it. Here's another nice cake for you, my dear,” and she actually stooped down and gave Pet two kisses, and I could not help contrasting Pet as she came running back to me blushing all over with delight, with Mabel slinking away round the laurel bush after stealing a cake, with a guilty, ill-tempered face, not really happy in spite of her greedy bag-full.

Rob had disappeared, tea was nearly over, and

he had gone to fetch the balloons. He returned with Mr. Marsden and William, each carrying a balloon, two small ones and one large one. The first was a pink and white one. We all stood in a ring. There was hardly any wind. Mr. Marsden gently inflated the balloon with common air, by lifting it carefully up, and letting it sink down. Then he and William held it lightly outside, and Rob stooped down and poured spirits of wine over the wool; then a lighted match, the wool flamed up; the hoop was a little too narrow, the sides we all thought must catch; the balloon quickly filled out, it stood alone. Rob only still held it; he lifted it, it rose, the flame was swaying dreadfully, it had left Rob's hand, it was off, but—but—it was on fire! A prolonged groan of disappointment burst from all the children as the poor balloon turned over, fell, and quickly burned out. Rob was pale and silent, but still confident.

“The hoop was too narrow, and the wool was too large,” he said. “The others will go up!”

It was the other small one—all white.

The same process was repeated, and this time the balloon filled without causing Rob any anxiety. He lifted it triumphantly, held it a moment on tip-toe, and then it sprang into the clear summer air, and floated away over our heads. We watched it. It caught fire up at a great height, and fell a long way off in flaming ruins, but we all considered it a perfect success.

And now for the big balloon! Mr. Marsden



got up on a chair to hold it. The Martin boys helped to hold out the sides with William. Rob lighted up, it filled beautifully, it rose majestically, it was the best shape of any. It soared rapidly, and we watched it



Up she goes!

till it became a black speck in the sunset sky. As far as we could see it did not burn, nor could any of us

say where it fell. We found out afterwards.

On the whole the balloons seemed a great success. The children were getting tired. They dispersed over the garden, but there was not much more to be done, and the carriages were soon announced. We drove home in the Ainslie's carriage. The sun had set, it was getting dark.

"There's a fire over there, Master Ben," said the coachman, pointing to the horizon with his whip in the opposite direction to where the sun had set, and sure enough the sky was lighted up with a lurid glow.

"'Tis a hayrick," he said. "I wonder what's done that!"

The next morning Papa came in looking very grave. "Here's a nice business," he said, "one of Master Rob's balloons fell last night on Farmer Stubbles' haystack, and set it on fire!"

How this could have happened we were all at a loss to conceive. Rob had so carefully explained that there could be no danger of that kind. "As long as the wool's alight," he said, "the balloon must keep up; if it burns, it will be all burnt

before it reaches the earth.' Yet it was evident enough that the balloon had burnt the haystack, for the wires of the hoop were found in the middle of the ashes. After some further reflection, however, Rob himself supplied the key.

"It's possible," he said, "that the burning balloon set fire to the cap-wire rim, which is bound in cotton and will burn, and that may have fallen burning or red-hot on the hay; or it's possible that the paper set fire to the bunch of wool again after all the spirits were burnt out of it, and the hot ashes of the wool may have burnt the rick."

And one of these two things doubtless happened. At any rate, the balloon accident proved a fatal Penalty to one more Pastime; and if any boy in the neighbourhood suggested the manufacture of one of those dangerous but fascinating toys, which ended by costing Mr. Ainslie such a round sum in damages to Farmer Stubbles, he was sure to be met with the remark,—

"Remember Rob Ainslie's balloon!"



Chapter III.

THE WATERLILY.



HAVE now to record one of those events which remain firmly impressed upon my mind—although, as I look back upon it, I can only wonder at my own stupidity and wilfulness. I am alluding to a quarrel I had with my dear Pet, which made us both very wretched for some days, but which ended

in our being more close and intimate friends than ever.

Amy Marsden, who was now growing quite a big girl, had called several times lately at our house to see Mabel; and each time, somehow or other, she managed to find me in the green-house or in the garden, and got me to pick her some gooseberries, or gather her a rose, or do something or other for her. Now, I always thought Amy a very shy girl, and she certainly was very quiet; but I had never thought much about her, she did not interest me much; but now somehow I began to change my mind about her. One day when she had come to see Mabel and found her out, she said to me, as I met her coming down the laurel walk—she used to walk alone from her house to ours, it was not very far—so, as I was saying, when she met me in the laurel walk, she took hold of my hand and gave me quite a pull.

“What are you at?” said I, as I took a horse-chestnut out of my pocket, and then, retreating a little way, I kept threatening to throw it at her.

She broke into a little laugh, and shielding her face ran at me to try and get the chestnut away; but I dodged, and we raced each other all down the long laurel walk. At the end there was a little gate leading into a field; I couldn't get the gate open in time, and she ran right up against me in fits of laughter. She was about eleven, and taller than I was, but being a girl I despised her, and made up my mind that she could do nothing if I put out my strength, so, clenching my teeth for an effort, I seized her by the wrists. She held her breath—I knew I was hurting her, but I didn't mind; I meant to show her that I was master. What this unusual gush of spirits meant in a girl usually so quiet and demure as Amy, I couldn't guess; but I thought then, as I have often thought since, you can tackle boys and you usually know after a bit what they are likely to do; but as for girls, you never can make them out—they're always taking you by surprise. So we struggled together for a moment in right earnest. Once I felt Amy had got the uppermost; she stood on

tiptoe and was bending my wrists right back. At that moment I conceived the beautiful idea of putting out my leg and tripping her up. I did this as I seemed to be sinking before her; I could see the triumph in her eyes; when suddenly with a little cry she loosened her grasp and fell heavily backwards against the stile. Where she fell, there she remained; she hid her face in the long grass and began to cry.

“Look here!” I said, rather frightened at what I had done, and thinking, I confess, of myself more than of her; for I knew if she chose to colour up this affair like Mabel, I should get into a nice scrape. But I didn’t understand Amy. “Look here! you are not hurt, are you? You began it, you know—didn’t you now?”

Not a word, not a movement, only a little sob. “She isn’t really hurt,” I argued, “or she’d get up, or turn, or rub her back, or hold her head, or do something. I know what girls do when they are really hurt, and I know what they do when they are only shamming. I’ve seen Mabel sham.” So I said rather in a hard voice—

“Look here! I ain’t going to stand here all day; I shall leave you if you won’t answer me,” and I walked a little way from her. Still she didn’t move—she lay as still as a stone; but I wouldn’t



Only shamming!

go back, so I walked on and began to whistle as though I didn’t care; but the further I walked the more my heart began to relent. “Perhaps I had really hurt her; I think one of my nails ran into her wrist—I’m not sure when I tripped her up that her knee wasn’t bent the wrong way; suppose she’s really hurt and can’t get up!” I had turned a corner into a bye-path, but the trees were not very thick, and so I stooped down and looked through towards the stile. There was poor Amy lying all of a heap—she hadn’t moved; her long bright hair was all in disorder, her face was

still hid in the grass, and I could now tell by her slight convulsive motions that she was crying bitterly. This was too much, I never could bear to see a girl cry; the boys used to laugh at me and call me soft noodle and mollycoddle—but I didn't care. I knew I wasn't. I had a regular fight once with Harry Martin about it, and some marks he then got upon his forehead served to remind him for some weeks afterwards that I wasn't such a mollycoddle as he thought; and, indeed, although I had my weaknesses, I was no coward, and the boys of our acquaintance soon found that out. However, I confess I was soft-hearted about girls, although I used to brag about the superiority of boys, and bully the girls at times as much as any one. But now a sudden revulsion of feeling seized me, and I ran back to Amy, and kneeling down by her side I tried to take her hands away from her face to see what she looked like, and find out where she was hurt; but she resisted, evidently in a pet; however, the sobs ceased.

“I say, Amy! I didn’t mean to hurt you—you began it, you know. I say, where are you hurt? Amy, Amy, why don’t you say something.” Still no answer. “I say, Amy; here’s some lemon-drops, dear. Take one, do—”

She turned her face half round. The lemon-drops had evidently told.

I pulled out a paper full, and putting two in her hand, I closed down the fingers upon them. She did not resist, but took no further notice beyond heaving a deep sigh. I pulled her handkerchief out of her pocket, and putting it to her face, I said,

“Amy, dry your eyes, that’s a dear.”

She certainly was a nice girl after all. I don’t know why I thought so just then. But I saw she was coming round, and I felt very glad.

“You’re a cruel boy!” she said, sitting up and throwing her long glittering hair back. I knew she was longing to taste the lemon-drops, but was too proud, and didn’t want to come round too suddenly, so I took her closed hand, and lifted

it in a playful sort of way to her mouth ; then I opened the fingers one by one—she didn't resist ; then I pressed a lemon-drop against her closed lips, which she pretended not to like ; but she could not help laughing, and as her lips parted in went the drop without much trouble.

“Get up,” I said, lifting her under both arms. She pretended to be very stiff. “Where are you hurt most ?” I asked.

“Oh ! All over,” she replied rather snappishly, as she now stood up and shook herself, and smoothed the creases in her rumped frock.

I easily perceived there was nothing the matter with her, and leaning on me rather heavily, she said,

“Where did you get those lemon-drops ?”

“Do you like them ?” says I ; “come out into the field and eat some more ;” for I didn't half mind walking with her, besides it was prudent to leave her in a good humour after what had occurred. She got over the stile with great difficulty, and made me lift her down. She was an awfully heavy girl ; and still limping a little and

leaning upon my arm, I led her down a pathway that ran through our field ending in the pond. She was well enough on the way to eat several more lemon-drops; in fact, she ate them all. As we stood by the pond and raked about with a stick to rouse the newts and tadpoles, Amy caught sight of a waterlily.

“Oh!” she cried, “may I have that waterlily? Do you think you could reach it? I do so love waterlilies.”

“Ah! well,” I said, “it’s just opened—yesterday it was shut. You can’t have it—I promised it to Pet Ainslie.”

“Pet!” she said rather scornfully, “what use can Pet make of it? Do you know I should so like it;” and she drew my arm towards her, and led me round until we stood nearly opposite to it; then she heaved a great sigh. I was afraid she was going to begin to cry again; but she only said in a dreadfully cast-down way, “I wish I was Pet!”

“But you aren’t,” I said, wishing more and more to give it her.

“Won’t there be another out soon—and can’t you give Pet something else. Oh! I do love waterlilies. Look here’s a stick; can’t you reach it; let’s look at it a little nearer.”

There could not be much harm in that I thought. So leaning down, whilst she leaned eagerly over me, I reached out with the stick until I felt under the water for the stem of the lily. Presently it ducked its head; Amy gave a little scream.

“It’s all right,” I said, “as the lily with its heart of powdered yellow came up unharmed; this time a little nearer to the shore. “Hold hard,” I cried, and I lay flat down. “Hold both my legs, or I shall tumble in,” and Amy held me tight round the ankles whilst I drew the lily nearer to the shore,

“Oh, it’s beautiful!” she cried in an ecstasy, leaning over me, and in her eagerness for the lily letting go of one of my feet—the shock this gave me as I grasped a willow twig hard by to support myself, gave the stick with which I drew the lily under water a violent jerk. Again the lily dipt

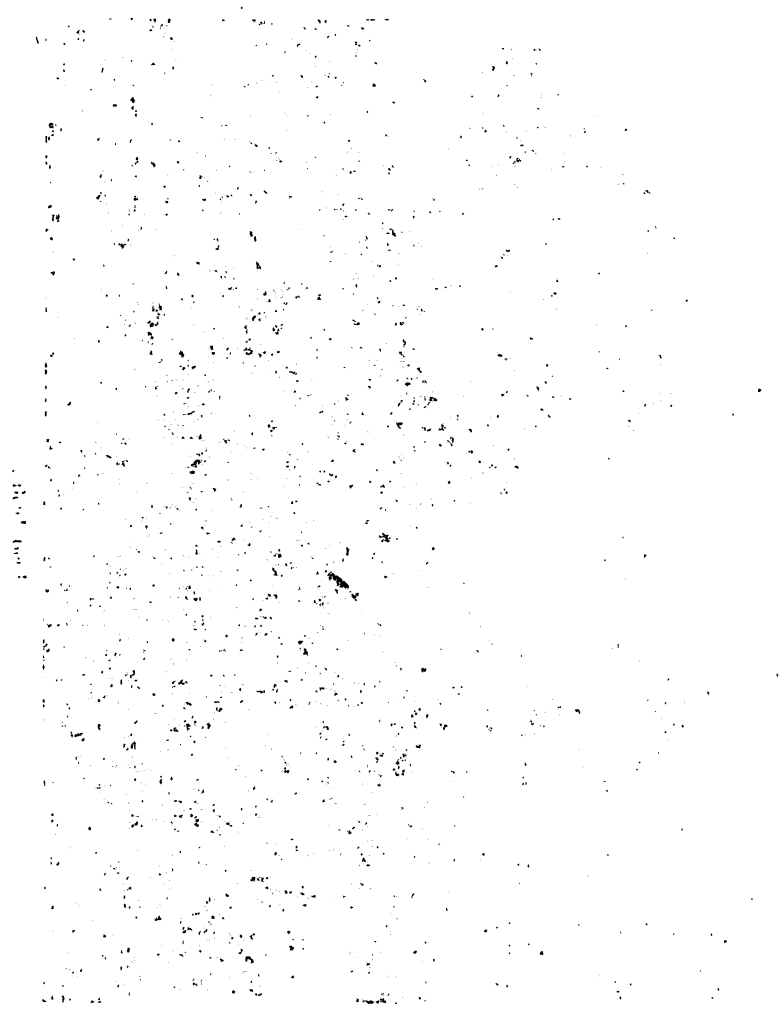


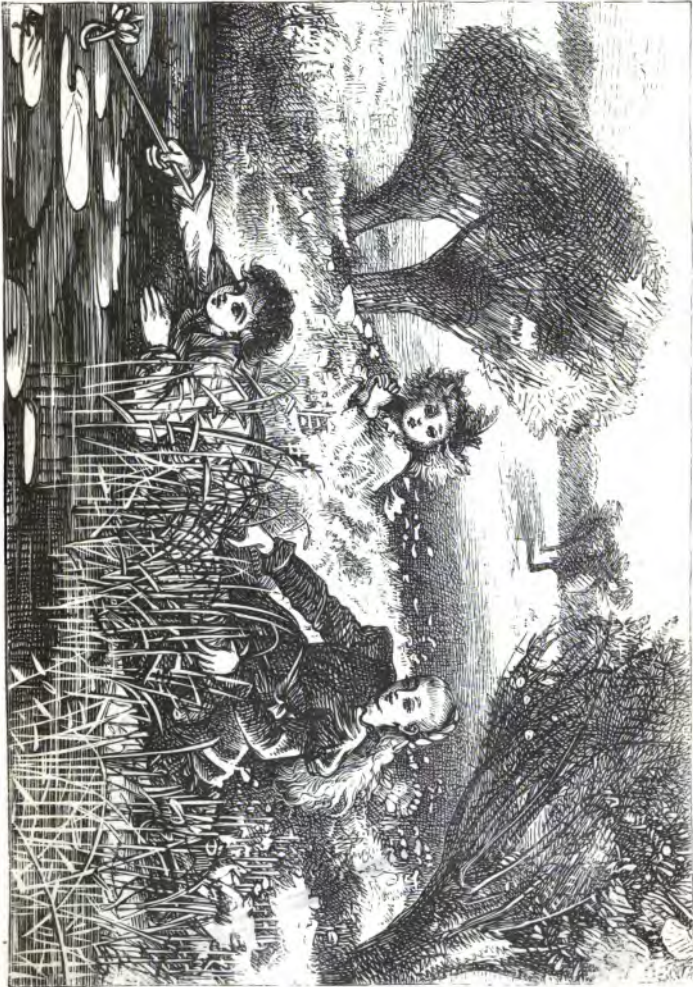
Photo Unit 1

"Can't you get it together our soken and can't you get it together something else? Oh! I do love when a fly looks in a man's stick; can't you reach it; let's catch it if we can't get it."

"The fly will be much harm in fact I thought," I leaned down, whilst she leaned eagerly over me, for I bent with the stick until I felt under my hand the stem of the fly. Presently she said to me: "Any give a little screen."

"I'll do it right," I said, "as the fly with its wings of powder yellow came up unharmed; this time a little nearer to the show." "Hold both eyes close and I'll try it down." "Hold both eyes close or I shall tumble in," and Amy led me to sit round the table whilst I drew the fly nearer to the stone.

"Oh, it's too good!" she cried in an ecstasy, "the fly over my hand in her own mess for the fly getting out of one of my feet—the show. This gave me a window twig hard by to support myself against the sock with which I drew the fly. When a stick jerk. Again the fly dipped



Oh, Ben ! Ben !

its white head. I thought it never would come up again. We both stood anxiously watching; presently it floated up, but this time it lay flat, stalk and all, upon the surface of the pond; it was close to the brink, and Amy darted down and seized it.

“Oh! I may have it now, mayn't I, dear Ben? Say I may,” and she kissed the white leaves tenderly. I couldn't refuse her. I felt I couldn't. I knew I should get into trouble with Pet, but Amy had quite got round me, and as she again drew my arm affectionately within hers, and looked and looked with her old, timid, half-frightened look into my face, the words slipt out of my mouth,

“All right; you can have it!”

No sooner had I uttered these words than Pet, who had run silently through the field, came behind us out of breath.

“Oh, Ben! Ben!” she could say no more; the tears were in her eyes, but she was so angry that she would not cry. Still under Amy's influence, I

confess that I didn't act a very noble part towards Pet. At that moment Amy seemed preferable to me. Pet was certainly not wanted; she was, in fact, an intruder.

"Pet," I said, "you always get everything. I give you everything, don't I?"

"You promised," she said in a voice still angry. She did not so much as speak to Amy, who, dreading that she would have to give up the lily, said,

"Oh, I must go—good-bye! Of course, if Pet is to have the lily, I must give it up, but I may just take it for a little till you decide, you know;" and she tripped away through the field leaving me in no very amiable mood with Pet.

"Ben, I never thought you would give it to any one but me, after you promised," said poor Pet, her anger already beginning to evaporate. I ought to have made some sort of apology, but I wasn't in the right mood. I felt vexed at Amy's going away, still more vexed at Pet turning up, so I merely said,

"Pet, you know, why shouldn't Amy Marsden

have things sometimes ? you have everything." I couldn't think of anything else to say, and we both walked towards the stile in silence.

"Have you got any more of those lemon-drops!" said Pet, in a rueful voice, evidently not wanting to quarrel with me, and gulping down her disappointment as best she might, but anxious also to console herself in some way for the loss of the lily. I don't know why I was so unsympathetic and hard to poor Pet. I wasn't in the right mood. I never felt so averse to her before. I wondered she couldn't see that I wanted to be with Amy, and didn't want to be with her, not just then at all events ; but she didn't see. I inwardly despised her for her stupidity. I didn't know then how she loved me with all the depth of her little warm heart, so I said hardly enough,

"Amy's had the drops." Pet's countenance fell. "I think Amy's a very nice girl," I continued, "and I shall give her drops if I choose."

Pet was not naturally jealous, but this was too much ; she bottled up her feelings, and merely said,

“You’ve been with her all the morning, and you’ve given her everything, and you don’t care a bit for me, and—and—you know—you know,” she couldn’t say any more; she ran away from me in an agony of grief, and I didn’t care. Ah! my dear little Pet. I remembered all this long afterwards. I felt what a brute I had been to you, and there came a time when I could not bear the sight of Amy Marsden, who was no worse than other girls, and when I knew what you were, who were so much better than other girls. But then I let you run away from me. I never called after you. I was thinking only of Amy Marsden; two hours ago I had not cared twopence for her, and now I liked her better than I liked you. I knew I had treated you badly; this only made me the more anxious to avoid you. I went home and sulked with Mabel until dinner-time. After dinner I went out into the garden and began throwing stones at Joe, who parried them with his spade. I tried to enjoy myself, and laughed, and used some bad language I had caught up in the street, of which I

did not know the meaning, but it seemed to shock Joe very much. Then I went into the yard, and, I am sorry to say, began teasing our dog Pompey, who was chained up, and then the bad thought came into my head, "I wish I could do something more naughty." At that moment I heard Mama calling me, and I felt somehow so guilty and altogether miserable that I ran away and hid myself in the barn, where I found a poor hen shut in, so I chased her round and round till I was tired, and then slunk indoors and tried to pretend I was in high spirits, but nurse saw through me, and said,

"What's the matter with you, Master Ben; have you been up to any mischief?"

"Oh, yes!" I said, "skimming the milk, of course, and eating jam and stealing apples, and beating the cat," and here I jumped over the table upsetting nurse's work basket.

"Now, you'll have to pick all these things up," she said quietly.

"Shan't!" I said, dancing round the table, as

was my custom ; she knew it was of little use to run after me, she had tried that too often, so she walked to the door.

“ I shall go straight to your papa.”

“ Can’t ! ” I said.

“ I shall, Sir.”

“ He’s out ! ”

“ I shall go to your mamma, then.”

“ Can’t ! ”

“ Nonsense ! ” and she opened the door.

“ Out, too,” I said. “ Cock-a-doodle-doo ! ”

This always annoyed her. I was certainly in a naughty mood. I couldn’t bear to be still. I couldn’t settle to anything ; at last I ran downstairs into the kitchen, where the cook was making jam. I knew nurse wouldn’t follow me, she was only too glad to be rid of me. The chances were that she wouldn’t tell, after all ; whenever she told of me, I always led her a life afterwards. I got on very well with the cook. She gave me some scum in a little pot. I ate it up, and when her back was turned I took more, and ran into the yard.

I ate so much simply because it seemed wrong, and I was in a naughty, wretched temper. I did not really care for over-eating myself, but my conscience was uneasy, and so instead of trying to right myself with Pet, and admitting that I had been led away by Amy against my better judgment, I kept going from bad to worse, out of a kind of perverseness or obstinacy. That night I was very sick, and had to take physic, which did not improve my temper, and I went to bed after gabbling through my prayers without any reverence, feeling about as proud and naughty and miserable as I ever did in my life. All that day I had not been myself; it was as if some bad spirit had got hold of me, and made me act wrong in all sorts of ways.

The next day I didn't go near Pet, but the day after I asked Mabel if she was going to see the Marsdens, and astonished her by saying that I should like to go too.

"What do you want to go to the Marsdens for?" she said sharply, looking at me with one of those hard inquisitive looks of hers which

seemed to say, "Up to some mischief I have no doubt."

"What do I want to go to the Marsdens for?" I repeated, being rather puzzled to know what to say. "What do I want to go to the Marsdens for?" I said again, for it was a stupid habit of mine to repeat in several different tones of voice, the last remark of any one who happened to be talking to me, whenever I could not find a ready answer. "Suppose I go without wanting to."

"Suppose you want to go without going," said Mabel with a sneer. "Secrets up between you and Amy, I suppose. You were long enough with her yesterday, and disagreeable enough afterwards."

However, it ended in my going down to the Marsdens with Mabel. Amy was in the school-room reading a story-book; to my surprise she did not seem glad to see me. She did not even lay down her book. She was not the Amy of yesterday, but the Amy of the day before yesterday; in short, the Amy I did not care twopence about! I was rather rude to her.

“A nice row I got into about the waterlily,” I said, trying to rouse her at first.

“You can take it back,” she replied carelessly.

“I don’t care about it.”

“No more do I, now it’s faded.”

“It will do for Pet,” she added with a saucy smile.

I had it on my lips to say—

“Pet’s worth a dozen of you; she don’t change about; she don’t get what she can and then leave a fellow—she don’t,” but I restrained myself. I remembered that I wasn’t on such good terms with Pet after all, although I had now become as quickly disenchanted with Amy as I had been quickly subdued by her artful ways. In short, Amy, who had always been so shy and proper, had come out in her true colours. She knew her own powers; she had tried them on, as I soon found, upon more boys than one; she was extremely pretty and weak, and at the same time cold-hearted and capricious, and that didn’t suit me at all. So then and there I resolved to throw her off. It was not necessary;

she had thrown me off. On my way home I called at the Ainslies' and asked for Rob. Pet was at the front door; directly she saw me she ran into the house, she would not speak to me. I called to her, she would not answer or come back.

"She must be offended in earnest," I thought to myself; "she never sulks for long; she always likes making it up." I did not wait to see Rob. I said I was in a hurry, and I hurried home much softened and downcast, and thinking what I had better do to bring Pet round. I couldn't eat my dinner.

"Eat up your fat," said nurse in a stern voice.

"Do you like fat, nurse?" I said in a conciliatory manner.

"Of course!"

"Then you can eat mine, for I don't want it."

Nurse was outwitted again, and was obliged to let me off my fat. I often wondered whether grown-up people ate fat when they didn't want it. Children are expected to eat fat and potatoes and lots of bread with very little butter on it, and do

what is called "finishing up their plates," which means eating all the nasty bits that grown-up people are allowed to leave. Grown-up people took as much sugar and milk in their tea as they liked. "Won't you take a little more sugar? Is your tea as you like it?" we used to hear Mama say this to visitors, but the children's tea was never quite sweet enough. There was always one lump too little, and if we wanted another it was called "waste," just as leaving fat and scraps at dinner was called waste. I thought a good deal about this at one time; and at last I settled that, as grown people never ate scraps and always had plenty of sugar, some one must suffer, and that it was part of a child's fate to have too little nice and too much nasty, in order that the grown-ups might have too much nice and too little nasty. Well, I got off the fats and scraps that day; I really could not eat my dinner, it might have been the physic, but I think it was Pet. She was as much in my thoughts now as Amy had been the day before. In vain I looked out of the window; she never came to the

opposite window to exchange signs, and another whole day passed without my seeing her. It was the holidays. I had not my day tutor to go to. Time was heavy on my hands. Mabel was not more pleasant than usual. Amy, who had been the cause of my trouble, showed no signs of sympathy with me, and offered me not the least compensation. Pet's absence had done more to draw me back to her than her presence on that unfortunate morning. I felt pretty certain that she would make no overtures to me—why should she? And yet I felt equally certain that she was not merely sulking; strictly speaking, she could not sulk, her nature wasn't sluggish and artificial enough for that; things either didn't affect her or offend her at all, or seemed to hurt her like a sharp knife; it was this last thought which decided me. I knew Pet was suffering because she thought I had thrown her over for Amy. She had not been willing or ready to believe it, but, after my actions and my behaviour towards her, how could she help believing it? So I took a pencil and paper into our

arbour, and kneeling down on the ground with my paper on the bench, I wrote in a fine bold hand—

“ My dearest Pet,

“ I am very sorry *horrid* Amy made me give her the lily. I have got some more drops for you, and I’ve got a kitten from cook. Come over, and don’t let Mabel see anything’s happened.

“ Your affectionate engaged BEN.”

I thought I could explain the rest; the kitten and the drops were the strong points of the letter. I felt that if both together didn’t move Pet, nothing would. But how should I get the letter to Pet? I didn’t want any one to know we had had a quarrel. I was not in the habit of writing letters; and if Mabel found it out, I should never hear the last of it. I put the letter in my trouser’s pocket, and went out at the front gate. There was no Pet at the window. I lifted up

her latch of their garden door and peeped into the front garden. The gardener was hoeing away.

“I say; are they out?” I said rather in an under breath.

“No, Master Ben. Miss Pet has not been well—so the nurse says.”

I was just retreating when Rob came out of the greenhouse with a dirty little pot and something very sticky inside it.

“I say,” he said eagerly; “did you ever see bird-lime? Take two bits of stick or a bramble with a lot of twigs; tie them to the ground, on a stump of a tree, you know, and then smear them over with bird-lime;” and his eyes began to sparkle as he stirred up the filthy mixture with the end of a tobacco pipe. “Sprinkle crumbs or corn, you know, over the twigs, and the birds will come down and stick in the lime, and you catch them, you know—that’s the experiment. Now, I’ve been thinking—” and here he fell into his well-known lecturing manner, which I hated.

“All right,” I said; “you catch the birds first

and then you can lecture—tell me about that afterwards. Look here; how's Pet?"

"How's Pet?" he said vaguely—the thread of his ideas being rudely snapped, but recovering himself at once. "Oh, Pet! She's been ill; can't eat her dinner; don't know what's the matter."

"I say, Rob—look here; there's a lot of sparrows down by our barn—twenty at a time,—you do something for me, and we'll put the bird-lime down there, and safe to catch them."

"What?" asked Rob.

"Well," I said fumbling in my pocket and bringing out my dirty little undirected note, "give this to Pet for me, and don't read it; it's nothing wrong, you know, nothing a bit wrong. I've had a sort of a—sort of a—well, you know, we had a quarrel—not exactly a quarrel—a misunderstanding—and this explains; and I want to see her, because I could explain better. It's nothing at all wrong—it's all right."

Rob was more particular about doing anything wrong than any of us; but he was thoroughly

trustworthy, and as he took the note thoughtfully and said, "All right," I knew it would reach its destination, and felt greatly relieved; only anxious, of course, about the result, and a little nervous, though very impatient to see Pet.

That afternoon there came a little note from Mrs. Ainslie, asking us both over to play and take tea with Pet and Rob.

My heart beat violently as I entered the Ainslies' drawing-room. Pet wasn't there; but Mabel and Rob went off to the conservatory together, and I soon found my way up into the nursery.

Nurse was out. Pet was standing with her back to the window as I entered.

"Pet!" I said hurriedly. She turned round—I thought very coldly and oddly—neither one thing nor the other. "Pet," I said, putting my arm round her, "did you get my letter?"

"What's it about?" said Pet.

"What's it about!" I said, puzzled, "Didn't you get it, and don't you understand?"

"I couldn't read it," she said timidly, but still coldly.

"Couldn't read it" I said; "where is it? where is it?"

"Here!" says Pet, pulling it out of her pocket.

"Give it me. I'll read it you;" for I couldn't bear to think that the letter which I had written had actually never been read by the very person to whom it had been written. I was thankful though, nobody else had been asked to read it for her.

It was a splendid opportunity to explain everything.

"Look here," I said; "this is it," preparing to decipher my own not very legible writing.

Pet sat down, looking rather surprised; she slipt her little hands into her little apron pockets, as she used to do when she meant to pay special attention. A little flush of excitement had come back to her pale cheeks, and her eyes brightened up as I began:

“MY DEAREST PET,

“I AM VERY SORRY HORRID, HORRID (you know), HORRID AMY MADE ME (she made me, you know—I never meant to break the stem of the lily at all. I was only moving it nearer just to look at. I told her she wasn’t to have it, because it was for you, you know—and she jerked me and the stem broke, and she grabbed the lily). HORRID AMY MADE ME GIVE HER THE LILY. I HAVE GOT SOME MORE DROPS (here’s one, Pet, and I pulled one out of my pocket), and forced it into her mouth) MORE DROPS FOR YOU (*you*, you know, I got them on purpose. AND I’VE GOT A KITTEN (a regular live kitten: such a beauty—black and white; eyes ain’t open yet. It’s in a basket in the barn. Come over and see it to-morrow, if you mustn’t come out now) FROM COOK. COME OVER, AND DON’T LET MABEL SEE ANYTHING’S HAPPENED.

“YOUR AFFECTIONATE ENGAGED BEN.”

"That's all," I said, my spirits quite rising as I perceived that my letter had a good effect upon Pet. She heaved a deep sigh, with just a tiny little pout.

"O, Ben ; I thought you didn't care about me. O, Ben, I'm so glad. You are engaged to me, aren't you?"

"Engaged! Of course," I said, giving her one of my loudest kisses. "It's all right now, isn't it?" and I sealed the peace with another lemon-drop.

"We're going to make some toffy," says Pet quite cheerfully.

"Toffy!" exclaims Rob, coming in at that moment with Mabel, "toffy is made of brown sugar. Brown sugar melts with heat ; so does butter. You must mix it with butter, and stir both up together, and then heat over the fire ; take a spoon and cool some in cold water—a kind of experiment, you know—just to see whether it is of the right stiffness."

"We're to have some of the toffy, I suppose,"

said Mabel, in a matter-of-fact kind of voice, "to take home, of course. You ought to have half and we ought to have half, and the eldest ought to choose first."

Mabel was settling everything in that horrid way of hers. No toffy was yet made, and here she was laying out the whole affair for her own advantage beforehand; for when she said "We're to have half," she meant, of course, "I'm to have half, and Ben's to have any I choose to give him."

"Let's make the toffy first," I said, cutting in before Mabel had time for any further plans, "we can settle all the rest afterwards, you know."

The long and the short of it was that Mabel got so disagreeable over the toffy, that, as usual, Pet and I were glad to get away, taking anything we could rescue, and going into the tool-room to eat it by ourselves. Meanwhile Mabel got all Rob's share out of him, and landed such an immense quantity in that bag of hers, which she constantly carried, that for weeks after I used

to wake up in the night, and hear her sucking all to herself the toffy she had hidden away.

Whenever I asked for it she said unblushingly,

“It was all gone long ago !”

However, I look back upon that afternoon with unmixed satisfaction ; it ended the only serious quarrel that ever separated me from Pet, and Pet’s behaviour all through only strengthened and confirmed my affection for her.

When Amy Marsden saw she had lost me, she was evidently annoyed ; not that she cared for me, except for what she could get, but her pride was hurt to think that after all I preferred Pet to her. Once only she attempted to win me over. Strange to say, it was in the matter of that very black-and-white kitten which I had promised to Pet. The kitten was to remain with us until it could see and feed itself, and then it was to go over to Pet. Well, Amy came one day and found me with the kitten. Amy was very sweet—she insisted on kissing me ; then she kissed the kitten ; then she leaned affectionately on me, and gave

me an old cracker—there was nothing in it; she promised me all sorts of things off a cake covered with white sugar she had got at home; she even went so far as to give me a gingerbread nut—very stale, by the way; then she praised up the kitten; then she said in her most winning, shy way,

“Ben, I have been so longing for a kitten!”

“It’s Pet’s!” I said sharply and decisively.

“Oh! wont you lend it me?”

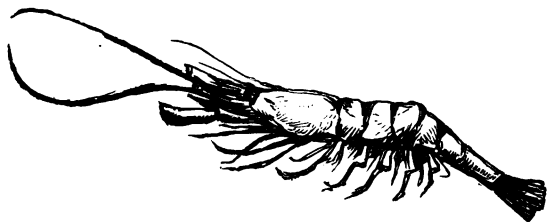
This was too much.

“Amy,” I said, “you are not going to have it, so you need not think so.”

Somehow I felt she was getting over me, although I positively hated her. So I walked away from her rapidly towards the house, and fortified myself by saying over and over again—

“Ben, remember the waterlily!”





Chapter III.
THE SEA SIDE.



I used to look forward to the end of summer. About the middle of August Papa used to say to Mama,

“My dear, I think the children must have a little sea air,

So in the summer of the year we all

went off to a delightful place in the Isle of Wight, where there were nice sands and lovely nooks and rocks and very few people, and not even many boats; but Papa used to say he didn't like the fashionable watering-places. My Papa was a lawyer, and when he got out of town, he said he wanted peace and quiet, as he got noise and crowd enough all the year round in town, up to which he went nearly every day, and down from which he came every night.

There were great consultations amongst us children,—would the Ainslies go to the same place? How delightful that would be! “You know,” says Pet, “you could have a boat—a toy boat, and swim it in the real sea; and, of course, I should have a spade, and dig holes in the sand and make castles, etc.; and then we could all go hunting on the rocks at low tide for mussels and periwinkles and crabs, and we could catch shrimps in the pools. Rob can net—he can prepare nets,—and then we shall have shrimps for tea every day!” And this thought seemed so overpowering to Pet that she clapped her hands and began to jump about with delight.

When it was settled that both families were actually going to the same sea-side place, Rob and Mabel were quite as pleased as myself and Pet.

For days before our departure Rob kept arranging yards and yards of sea-fishing tackle, and preparing nets and cross-bars with lead in the middle and hooks hanging down on each side. I got a new boat rigged like a cutter, and made everything taut, as the sailors say, for the sea. Mabel prepared oil-skin bags and boxes of various sizes, and took a large scrap box to collect and press sea-weeds in,—of course her private smuggling-bag was not forgotten; and one fine morning we engaged a carriage all to ourselves and off we went to Portsmouth. We were none of us sea-sick crossing to Ryde, and from thence we had a long drive to our little retired watering-place on the other side of the Island.

We took nice lodgings on the esplanade just opposite the sea, and the Ainslies were only next door.

Of course, tired as we all were, we rushed out on to the beach after tea. It was low tide, there

was a man shrimping, we got some real live shrimps from him; Mabel put them into her bag,—for once that bag was really useful to us all,—the creatures began jumping about in fine style, but they soon got faint and lay pretty still. Then we followed some sailors who were tracking the damp sand for sand-eels. How nice the sea-weed smelt; we got several shells and stones, and nurse had a rare business to get us indoors; it was growing late and we were really tired out before we went to bed that night to dream of the delights of the morrow. To dream, I said, but I couldn't sleep; tired as I was, I was so excited that I kept tossing about and watching the moon that had just crept in at the window.

Nurse was sleeping in the back room with Mabel, I was in a little front room by myself.

I got up quietly, I went to the window, slipped it open, it was not cold; I looked out, the esplanade was silent, the sea was coming up in long smooth waves; they broke gently upon the shingly beach with a low rustling sound, something like autumn

leaves in a shrubbery when the wind stirs them: Far out to sea the moon was literally blazing over the water. I never saw such a moon,—a boat came into the blaze like an inky spot on white paper; I could hear the splash of oars, although so far out to sea, and the silence was only broken by the rustling waves. I heard voices floating over the water. Surely the boat could not be so far off as it seemed. “She went down about here,” said one man; “you couldn’t see an inch for the wind and the rain—black as soot—sea blinded us—awful!”

What were they talking about? Some fearful wreck no doubt. I looked at the calm, sweet sea, flooded with the full moon, and a little shudder passed through me as I thought of the same sea convulsed by a storm, running mountains high; and I went back to bed and fell into a troubled sleep to dream of a fearful tempest, and fancy myself in the ill-fated ship that went down where I had seen the moonlight. I woke up with a scream of terror,—it was broad daylight. The sun was

shining brightly into my room and dazzled my eyes, "Where am I! Where am I! Save me! Save me!" I shouted half awake, but nurse was standing dressed by my bedside, and only said, "What's the matter, Master Ben? You've been dreaming. I told you you were eating too many shrimps last night for tea."

The connection between bad dreams and shrimps did not at once strike me, so I only said,

"You were shelling away fast enough at the shrimps yourself," to which she only replied,

"Come along, Miss Mabel is half dressed. You'll be late for breakfast, Master Ben."

If there was a weakness which nurse had, it was shrimps; and I could see she was glad to change the conversation. All that morning Mabel and Rob were busy collecting sea-weed. Pet and I were busy on the sands, making a great castle with a trench round it, and a long sort of pier of sand stiffened with sea-weed. The tide was coming up.

"Now," I said "make the mound or castle very big and firm, then you can stand on it, Pet; the sea

will come all round you when the tide comes up, except on one side, and on that will be the pier."

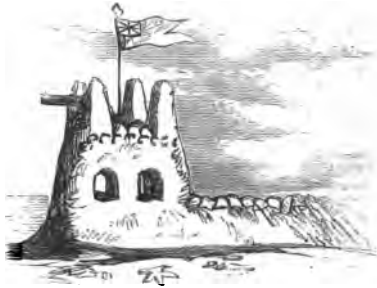
"And then when the mound gives way," cried Pet in great excitement, "I can run along the pier and jump on to dry land."

This was splendid. Several children who saw our great sand works joined us, and we worked hard all the morning. I was chief engineer. It was my idea, and I directed the works.

"We must have the trench deeper," I said, and bring lots more barrows of sand. We had cleared a wide, deep trench all round the big mound, and it was filling with water of its own accord before the sea came; we were, therefore, obliged to hasten the construction of our pier. We could not any longer approach the castle, except on the side of the pier. All the sand had to be brought along the pier and piled in spadefuls on the castle. There was room for four to stand together on the castle.

It was a splendid edifice, with square ramparts sloping down to the trench, and four tall turrets facing towards sea and land. As the pier grew

bigger and firmer, the castle had to be enlarged; and I began to discover that, without knowing, I had quite a genius for directing the work of others, although too impatient to work for long at anything myself.



We had quite a crowd of children at work. Even Rob and Mabel collected shells and helped to decorate the "castle by the sea."

The children obeyed me wonderfully, as I stood with my spade giving all sorts of exciting directions, talking, holloaing incessantly, and seeing that my ideas were carried out.

"You mustn't all do the same thing. All the girls ought to dig sand and collect masses of seaweed; some boys must wheel it up to the pier, and others must carry it on and build it up."

And, by dint of shouting and rushing about, I at last got my orders obeyed; and with this

simple division of labour, the work went on merrily. There were always three barrows drawn up one behind the other at the foot of the pier, and three boys waiting to unload the contents, and strengthen and lengthen the pier and build the castle up higher and higher.

As I stood and watched them—for it was now agreed that I was to be the engineer—I thought it was indeed a noble sight, and I determined in my own mind that I would, when I grew up, make bridges and railways and always superintend great works, and this was not a bad beginning.

One o'clock came, and the sea was still a good way off, but it was coming up faster and faster—nearer and nearer. We raced home to dinner; we agreed, all of us, to meet directly after dinner and watch the tide and see the grand results of our labour in the sea-surrounded castle, and then put the pier in actual working order.

Rob and a big boy volunteered to stay behind to see that no marauder interfered with our splendid works. From our windows we could see our castle

and the two sentinels keeping watch, with drawn spades shouldered, and walking up and down in true soldierly style. We sent them out provisions—sandwiches, and two bottles of ginger-beer, and biscuits. But we gobbled up dinner so fast that we were soon out again at the scene of action ourselves.

“Pet,” said I, “you take a flag, and you shall go on first when the sea comes up.”

Rob here made a fine suggestion. He had got two little ship cannons. He was to put them in position on the ramparts and fire them off. This was called opening the castle.

I moored my cutter in the trench in front of the castle, connecting it to the foot of the pier with a long string; and the work being now perfect, we waited for the tide. Already the water had begun to rise rapidly in the trench, and my cutter, with every sail spread, was floating nobly to and fro, beating up and down in front of the castle. Happily the sea was very smooth, and the tide came up in soft and gentle swells.

The children, still under my command, stood in

a crowd round the foot of the pier ; two were to go on at a time. Pet was to go first with a flag, and Rob was to follow her with the cannon.

At a given signal, Rob being ready, whilst Pet planted the flag proudly on the top of the castle, bang ! went one little cannon, and bang ! went the other, and a shout rose from the assembled children as the first full wave came welling softly into the trench and crept up on either side of the pier.

“Come off !” I cried to Rob and Pet, and I then told off two more to go on—a boy and a girl ; and whenever Rob’s cannon was ready, of course he had to go on and fire it off.

But the sea rose higher and higher ; the pier was giving way in the middle.

“Stop !” I shouted, and I seized two stout boys and employed them as sappers and miners to go up the pier and repair the breach with clumps of seaweed, sand, and shingle. But the water kept rising and rising, and the children kept passing to the castle in turn, two and two, till the last couple had got on ; and the water kept rising, and rising.

“Come off!” I cried.

But the children lingered. I saw the weak place, half down the pier, giving way. In another moment a great clump of sea-weed fell out; and the water kept rising and rising.

“Come off! come off! or you’ll be drowned!” I shouted wildly; “the pier’s going!”

To repair it was impossible; it had gone too far. In another moment a great yawning chasm appeared; the children were cut off from land. The castle looked right out at sea, on an island; and the water kept rising and rising.

Frantic with fear, the two children turned and rushed up the pier—the castle itself had begun to crumble, one of the turrets had already been washed away—clutching the flag, the boy, pulling the little girl, stumbled along the now yielding pier and paused at the chasm. There was full six feet of sea between them and the land; for the rest of the pier had crumbled like snow when the middle had once fairly given way, and the water kept rising and rising.

The two terrified children stood tottering on the brink.

At this moment Rob turned to me, and, quietly tucking up his trousers, said,
“Come along!”



I followed his example, and in we both plunged, wading up to our knees through the advancing tide. We were both bigger than the two little ones on the pier—the youngest, of course, having gone on last.

“Hold tight!” I said, as I reached the children. Fortunately, Rob and I were quite cool. I locked the little girl’s hand in her brother’s, and again said to each, “Hold tight!”

Rob took the boy’s other hand, and I took the little girl’s, and thus all four of us—the two little ones linked in the middle—made a rush to the shore. We swung the small children through, or rather over, the six feet of water, and landed

them safely, having wet ourselves through to the waist.

Even then my thoughts were with the castle, and, as I looked back, I was just in time to see its last proud tower sink into the hungry sea!

The poor little things were more frightened than hurt, and, beyond their feet and socks, they were not even wet; but this adventure put an end to my castles by the sea, and I was obliged to conduct my engineering works for the future a little further inland.

It would take me too long to tell of all the fun we had on the rocks. In the deep pools we caught some fine prawns with Rob's net on the top of a stout pole. As we leant over a certain rock we could see the fat prawns dodging about in the pool beneath. Pet was quite surprised to find them of a dull-greenish colour:

"Oh!" she cried, when first I fished one out, "I thought they were red."

"They're red when they're boiled," I said, "you great silly."

We used to manage in this way. When we saw a fine big prawn lying still within reach, Pet took a stick and put it slowly to his nose, whilst I held the net some way behind him. He would lie quite still, but the instant the stick touched him, he darted backwards into my net, and I whisked him out of the water. On these occasions Mabel found it most interesting to hold the bag, and we sometimes got thirty or forty big prawns in an afternoon, and brought them home and boiled them for tea.

In a certain pool there used at low water to live many crabs—some good large ones,—and we had rare fun trying to take them up, for we could catch them easily enough. A bit of meat at the end of a string was quite sufficient to attract them; they hung on greedily and we pulled them out, but the difficulty was to prevent them from catching us!

Mabel came running towards us one afternoon, screaming out,

“I’ve caught a crab! I’ve caught a crab!”

But when we looked we saw that she was trying

to shake it off her sleeve ; it was but too clear that the crab had caught Mabel. Then we used to bathe, but I never liked bathing myself. I always got shivering cold. Pet liked it though, and she and Mabel used to have great fights in the water and under the water.



Rob nearly drowned himself making experiments. He got an air cushion, tied it round his waist, and went floating proudly out to sea ; when the air cushion slipt down towards his feet, of course down went his head, and he was soon floating feet upwards ; fortunately a gentleman was swimming close by and saved him, or he would never have come home again. You can fancy that air cushions were forbidden after that.

We went out fishing one day ; we sailed to the place and anchored a long way out to sea where

there were some rocks, as we were told, under water.

Now was the time for Rob's fishing-tackle. But before we got to the place Rob got very green and pale and was dreadfully sea-sick. I felt queer myself; however, we anchored and let down the tackle. The fisherman and Papa were the only ones that caught anything, so it was rather dull for us children; it took a long time, then up came an eel which covered every one with slime, then a dog-fish, then another dog-fish, and that was all we caught in three hours.

On the way home, however, I sailed my boat; she didn't seem to go along very fast; in fact, in comparison with our rowing she seemed to stand quite still, but the sailor said she was a regular clipper and went like steam, and of course he knew. So I was very proud of the 'Arethusa,' that was her name. Papa said the 'Arethusa' was a good name; so it must have been, it sounded right enough. I changed it afterwards and called it the 'Pet,' after my dear little friend and companion.

As I said before, it would be quite impossible to describe all the fun we had and the adventures we met with ; but towards the end of our holidays by the sea-side, I had one adventure so dreadful that to my dying-day I shall never forget it.

We used to go out every afternoon, about three o'clock. Well, one afternoon when I met Pet on the sands, I said,

“Look here, Pet. I've got a plan !”

“What is it? do tell me?” said Pet, always eager for adventures.

“Well, don't you recollect Robinson Crusoe? He was cast on a desert island, and lived right away from every one until he found Friday, and then the savage lived with him. Now, you know the Isle of Wight's an island, and some way down the coast, round the corner, there, you know, it's quite desert; there's no boats; there's no houses, and there's no people. Well, let's pretend to lose ourselves. We've got plenty of time. You shall be Friday, and I'll be Robinson Crusoe, and we'll find a desert cave right away from everybody.”

"But they'll miss us," says Pet.

"Let them miss us," replied I scornfully. For the desert island had fairly taken possession of my imagination.

"But they'll be angry with us."

"Oh! no they won't; not when we come back. We shall be back in an hour, you know. We shall say we went exploring. I went exploring a little way by myself the other day; I was gone quite half an hour. Nurse was working on the beach, and she didn't miss me; didn't even ask me where I had been to. It's quite early," I said, almost whispering eagerly in her ear.

"Let's go round that corner whilst no one's looking."

And I half led half pulled her along the sands towards a jutting part of the cliff which formed one arm of a little bay. Directly we got round the corner, the sand was deliciously smooth and untrodden.

"This isn't desert enough," I said, "come along."

And we both raced as hard as ever we could to the other horn of the bay which stood further from

the sea. We rounded it, and found ourselves in perfect solitude.

“I wonder why no one’s here;” I said, “this is the best sand I’ve seen, and look at these caves, why they’re fit for smugglers!” For I was not able to conceive of anything more entirely satisfactory and romantic for caves than smugglers. “I wonder why no one is here!”

“Perhaps it’s dangerous,” said Pet, with a curious presentiment. “Let’s go back.”

“Why, you’re not afraid, are you, Pet?” I said. “Well, I forgot you’re only a savage, you know.”

“I’m not afraid,” said brave little Pet. “I don’t mind going where you go.”

“Then come along round the next cliff,” I cried, setting off, not having explored half enough to suit me. And we ran to the next promontory, and this seemed still further from the sea. I peeped round the next corner, and saw that the next promontory stood out further towards the sea again. We had been retreating from the sea, and our little solitary bay was comparatively quite inland. On all sides

of us rose steep rocks; below were caves. We entered one; the sea was a long way off, though we found it had washed right into the cave, and had risen about six feet on the rocks. Well, we played about and explored cave after cave, when Pet suddenly said,

“I say, Ben, was the tide going out?”

“Let’s see,” I said, for the first time beginning to think it prudent to be retracing our steps.

“Yesterday it was coming in, so it must be coming in to-day.”

That didn’t quite follow; but as it happened I was right, the tide was coming in.

We now looked both at the same time towards the angle of the cliff, round which we had come into our bay. If the water was not up to it, it was close up to it.

“Run, Pet!” I shouted, and I set off at full speed. I arrived just in time. I rounded the promontory, Pet following close behind me. The sea was rolling in with a fine fresh breeze; but there was another and yet another to be rounded

before I could regain the spot from whence we had started near home. No sooner had I got round the first cliff into the bay than the water closed up the narrow passage—and oh, horror! as I raced across the bay, Pet panting after me, I saw the water already rising against the next jutting cliff. We were cut off on both sides, we could neither advance nor retreat; we were shut into the bay; even had we gained the next we should have been little better off, for we could not have rounded the promontory which stood still nearer to the sea than the one which lay before us already deep in the water.

“Pet,” said I, in an agony of distress, “what shall I do—what shall I do?”

“You can’t help it,” said Pet, trying to hide the rising tears. “Suppose we’re drowned—is it very painful, Ben? Are you horribly afraid, Ben? I am horribly afraid. Oh, Ben, Ben! do you think if we asked God to save us now, he would?”

“Oh! I don’t know,” I said wildly, for I had never thought much about God, not even when I

said my prayers, I am afraid ; but Pet was different. "You pray, Pet," I said.

My dear Pet knelt down on the sands, and shut her eyes and clasped her hands and said the Lord's Prayer out loud, whilst I stood staring wildly at the sea as it came rolling in and narrowing the space of sand at every wave. Then Pet got up very subdued, but not frightened. She was quite calm, only she could not help her tears flowing ; and hand-in-hand, believing ourselves condemned to death, we ran to the foot of the rocks, and then backwards and forwards, in the hope of finding some ledge to climb upon above high-water mark ; but the rocks were steep and smooth. We knew that it was of no use to call, although we called and shouted till we were hoarse. There was no one in the bay we had left, and there was no one foolish enough to be in the bay next to us on the other side ; if there was, they were in the same predicament as ourselves. There was only one little foothold, and above that a sort of sloping platform, almost too high to reach ; and when reached, it

would have been hard to cling to ; and had we been there, we should have been half under water when the tide was high. Neither of us spoke. When people are absolutely hopeless, they either go mad or keep silence.

“Pet,” I said at last, with a bitter and despairing effort, putting my arm round her and pressing her close to me. “Pet, you’ll die with me, and it will be my fault!” And I burst into tears; these were the first tears I had shed. “You forgive me, Pet, don’t you—say you forgive me? I’ve been a bad wicked boy—I’ve led you wrong—I’ve been bad all my life. Oh! Pet, Pet!” And I laid my head on her shoulder and sobbed bitterly.

“Ben, Ben, don’t cry so,” said Pet, crying herself all the time. “You’re a dear good kind Ben, and I don’t mind, only—only—” and here she broke down, “I don’t want to die!”

There was no time for more ; a cruel cold wave washed over our ankles where we stood close up against the rocks. This roused me with the energy of despair. I rushed to the place where I had

noticed the ledge of rock ; I knelt down with both my hands buried in the water.

“ Get on my back, Pet ; there’s a niche higher up for your foot. We’ll try once more ! ”

She got on, and I then rose slowly with her. She clambered on to my shoulders.

“ Take hold of my head ! ” I cried.

Pet’s limbs were strong and active. I steadied myself against the rock, I stood upright. Pet’s feet were on my shoulders ; she was standing bolt upright, too ; the niche was at her waist, whilst I felt my feet sinking into the wet sand. I seized her legs tightly.

“ Now, ” I cried, for the first time feeling that although I should probably be drowned, there was a chance of saving her, “ hold quite stiff. ” I was strong in the arms ; I raised her up bodily till her right hand grasped the upper ledge, and she hoisted herself off me, with one foot in the niche. In another moment, whilst I watched her wild with excitement, forgetting my own peril, she sprang up on the ledge with a cry of joy.

“I’m saved, Ben! How will you get up—how will you get up?”

I was soaked through and shivering, but as I looked up and saw Pet in comparative safety, I burst into a kind of hysterical laugh, and my teeth began to chatter violently. My head began to reel, I think in another moment I should have stumbled back into the fast rising tide; but I was recalled to my senses by Pet’s presence of mind. The ledge turned out to be wider and less sloping than it looked from below. Pet lay down flat, and stretching her right arm over as far down as she could, she cried cheerily,

“Lay hold of my hand—I’ll pull you up.”

I clutched her hand, giving at the same time a spring, I grappled with the other hand the indented niche by which Pet had gained her present platform. It was a terrible moment. I felt Pet rolling almost over with my weight. I should have let go; but she would not. With one hand in the niche and the other hand in hers, I scrambled up like a spider—how, I cannot tell; somehow I

got my right foot into that same niche, and with one spring I landed myself on the rocky ledge with Pet.

What joy was ours at that moment! and yet we were not saved. If the sea got rough we should be washed off that ledge in no time; if it continued to rise smoothly, it would be at least up to our knees at high tide; and as we might wait there hour after hour, we might easily slip off and be drowned at any moment.

“What shall we do now?” I said.

“We can’t do anything, we can’t get up any higher, we must wait. Perhaps a boat will come; if not, we must wait till the tide goes out. Oh, what a fright they’ll be in at home!”

My heart sank within me as I pictured to myself the state in which they would all be at home. I cannot say how long we had been there, but we were both getting very cold and hungry. The water crept up higher and higher. Pet started—the first little splash had washed over our ledge. The wind was rising, and every moment the waves

grew rougher and rougher. The ledge was soon flooded. We were obliged to stand in the water. Every time we moved, our feet slipped. We clung to each other. Pet was shivering with the cold, but bore up bravely, her eyes were wide open, and had a fixed, almost dreadful stare. She was getting quite numb and dreamy-looking; her little hat had fallen into the sea and floated away. Presently her head sunk on my shoulder, her eyes closed, she was sinking off to sleep with fatigue and excitement.

“Pet! Pet!” I said, “wake up, I shall let you drop!”

But poor Pet was sinking down, almost sitting in the water; she had kept up evidently as long as she could; her strength was now quite spent. I suddenly saw that, although she opened her eyes and looked dreamily at me, she was hardly conscious. I couldn't support her, she slid down, the water was up to her waist, and she leaned against the rock, with her head on one side and half her hair already in the water. Another moment, and as I

held her, I felt her body was almost buoyant in the waves. I could hardly keep my own footing. I never to my dying day shall forget that awful



Her eyes closed!

moment, nor the feeling of utter helplessness as I still held her little body, now swaying about like a dead thing, as the waves washed higher and higher,

whilst I myself almost lost my balance in the attempt to keep her on the ledge.

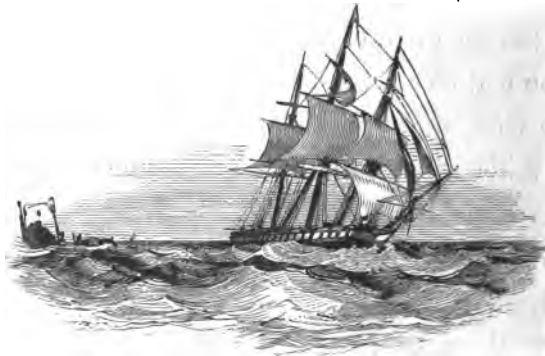
“Halloa! halloa! hold hard!”

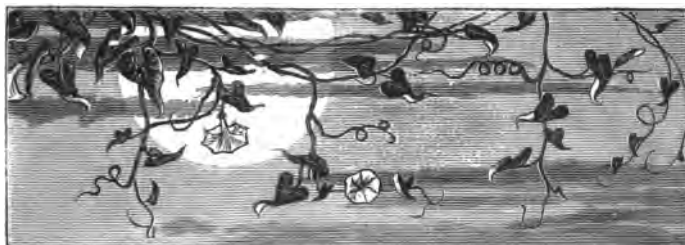
I only had time to look over my shoulder, and see a boat rowing furiously towards us, when a big wave lifted us both off, and locked in each other's arms we sank exhausted into the sea.

The boat must have come up just then and caught us as we rose, for a living body will rise once or twice whilst the breath is in it. The next thing I remember was opening my eyes, and finding myself lying at the stern of a rowing-boat. Pet was lying at the bottom wrapped in a sailor's coat. Her eyes were shut, and two violet rims were round them. The sailor rowed fast; I watched him dreamily, I was very faint and could not speak.

Well, the adventure was over, neither of us was dead. The next day we were pretty well; but the terror, the consternation of all at home. True! I did not see or hear much of it at first, but for days, for weeks, and months afterwards it was the talk of the house. There was an end for many a long day

to my long solitary rambles with Pet. Not unnaturally we were constantly watched, and whenever we had planned any private walk or proposed to make any expedition by ourselves, we were instantly pulled up with the very natural but very unpleasant words, "Ben, you are not to be trusted alone with Pet; remember your narrow escape in the Isle of Wight."





Chapter XX.

THE RIVER.



ATE in the autumn we all got back. We certainly had managed to enjoy ourselves very much on the whole. Pet was all right, and I got no real harm from my ducking in the sea, although that fearful afternoon on the rocks made such an impression upon my mind that, for years after-

wards, I used to dream of the tide coming up, and

wake in terror. I think from that time both Pet and I seemed to grow suddenly older. I don't think I was quite so troublesome in the nursery, or quite so boisterous at play, or quite so rude to the other girls.

I think Pet had lost some of her very high spirits, and I used to surprise her sometimes looking very grave; but we were faster friends than ever.

"Pet," said I, one day, when I found her in the garden sitting on one arm of the wheelbarrow in a sort of dream, "Pet, what are you thinking about?"

"Oh! nothing in particular," she said, colouring up; "that is, nothing you would care about much."

"What do you look so grave for, then?"

"Oh!" said she, beginning to rock herself to and fro, and draw lines on the sandy path with her little foot, "Oh! was I looking grave? I'm not grave now"—and she broke into one of her fresh, sunny smiles, that always made my spirits rise.

“But you were grave—quite solemn, just now. I say, what were you thinking about?”

“Well,” says Pet, “I was thinking, you know, about that day on the sea-shore, when we were both so nearly drowned. Do you know, Ben, that nice, dear Miss Robin’s been here to-day. She came with Dicky and a note, and afterwards I had such a nice walk in the garden with her—and I do love Miss Robin. I wish she was our governess; she talks to me just as if I was grown-up, you know, and that’s so nice; one doesn’t like always to be talked to as if one was a silly little child, quite young, because I’m not *quite* young,” she continued, with a little deprecating pout, looking down all the time and drawing more lines on the gravel.—“And Miss Robin isn’t at all a dull, prosy thing, like old Miss Sparks, who teaches us arithmetic twice a week; *she* doesn’t understand me at all. Then she takes such a time looking over my sums through her spectacles. I am sure she doesn’t half understand it herself; but Miss Robin’s quite different. She takes up

a slate with such a pleasant smile, one begins to like even sums when she teaches them. Then she's so quick—finds out the mistakes at a glance—and so patient and kind—”

“Well, but that's nothing to do with your being so grave. What did you talk about with her?”

“Oh! I was just going to say. I was telling her all about that dreadful afternoon, and I asked her a question I often wanted to ask some one; you know, Ben, I knelt down and said a prayer on the sands when the tide was coming up—it was only the Lord's Prayer. I could not recollect anything else, but I meant, of course, I prayed God would *save* us; and we were saved, weren't we, Ben?”

“Yes, of course, we were saved,” I said, getting rather thoughtful myself; for I had taken to thinking about things lately—just like Pet.

“Well, what I asked Miss Robin was, whether she thought we were saved because God heard and answered my prayer.”

“ Well, what did she say ? ”

“ She didn't say anything at first, but she put her hand upon my neck and stroked my cheek, and so I went on telling her how, just when I fell into the water, the boat came round and pulled us out ; and it all seemed quite natural ; it didn't seem as if God Himself was doing anything to save us ; and I said so to her.”

“ Well, what did she say to that ? ”

“ She said, ‘ Listen, Pet. On some snowy night your mamma learns that a poor woman, with her children, are perishing with cold and hunger in a miserable little cottage at the bottom of the hill. What would she do ? ’

“ ‘ Oh, ’ I said, ‘ she would ring the bell, and tell John to make haste and take warm blankets, and food, and all sorts of things, down to them at once. ’

“ ‘ She would not go herself ? ’

“ ‘ No, she would send John ; it would be much more natural for him to go. He could get the cart and horse and make his way through the snow. He would be the right person, you know. ’

“ ‘Well,’ continued Miss Robin, ‘if your mamma chooses the fit person to help a poor woman at a distance, is it not possible that God, Who “loves you and hears you pray,” should choose the fit person to help you?’

“ ‘Yes; but Miss Robin,’ I said, ‘God did not speak to the fisherman and tell him to come round the corner at that very moment in time to save us. The fisherman was sent by our papa to hunt along the coast to see if he could find us.’

“ ‘Did your papa know that you had gone along the sands?’

“ ‘Papa wasn’t there. When nurse missed us, she thought we had gone up a path leading to the fields, and went to look for us. When she could not find us, she hunted round the rocks on the sands, but never thought we had strayed so far as we had, and she would never have thought of sending a boat after us down the coast. She came home; and papa instantly, as if some one had told him, said, “They’re down on the sands!” and he ran out and found a boatman and sent him

off instantly. He said it flashed across his mind suddenly.'

"Then Miss Robin said, 'How do you think things flash across your mind?'

"'Oh,' I said, 'they come of themselves.'

"'Do you remember, dear child,' she then said, when you are at church, in the Prayer-book you say, "*Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit.*" You profess there to think that some thoughts are suggested to you by the Holy Spirit. In another collect you pray to be delivered from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; so that good and evil thoughts may be suggested by good and evil powers outside you.'

"Then I said, 'Was it put into papa's head to send at the right time to save us?'

"'Why not?' said Miss Robin.

"'And in consequence of my prayer?'

"'Why not?' said Miss Robin.

"'And if I had not prayed, do you think we should not have been saved?'

“‘Does your mamma never send help to anyone unless she is asked? Does she never find out their wants unless she is told?’

“‘Yes,’ I said, ‘often.’

“‘Do you remember a prayer which says that God knows our petitions before we ask, and our ignorance in asking?’

“Well, I didn’t remember *that* prayer, and I said so.”

“‘Never mind, dear,’ continued Miss Robin; ‘it is possible that many good things come to us without our asking, and that many good things come to us in consequence of our asking; and it is not possible to say for certain, in any one instance, whether a thing has happened because it was good for us, or because it was asked for by us, or because of both.’

“And then Miss Robin went on to tell me that, just as there were people interested in us on earth, besides God, so there may be people interested in us who are not on earth, besides God; and just as God gives us father and mother and friends to help us here, so

others whom we cannot see may be interested in us, and may be the instruments, in God's hands, of helping us in many ways. And then she asked me if I remembered a text, which I did not, which says, 'Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto such as are heirs of salvation?' And then she did not say much more that I can remember, you know, Ben; but I have been thinking since that all sorts of things that seem to happen, as we say, by chance, may not, after all, be chance; and I feel more and more sure that we were saved because God put it, or allowed it to be put, into some one's head to save us."

My attention was beginning to wander. I think Pet was naturally more thoughtful than I was, and I am sure in many ways she was twice as clever; she was getting on so wonderfully fast with her lessons—I am sorry to say I was not. I was always carpentering now, building wood huts and constructing imaginary railways. I got much fonder of Rob too, for he seemed to take a good deal of interest in my pursuits; they seemed to

him more scientific than they used to be, and I began to do him more justice, for the fact was that Rob, modest and good-natured as he was, was much superior to all the boys of my acquaintance, and he certainly knew more than all of us put together.

At the bottom of our garden there ran a nice river. It wound round to a field belonging to the Martins, some distance off. At the bottom of their field was a boat-house, and in it was a boat. We went out fishing sometimes, but never without a man.

I was walking towards this field by the river when we met the two Martin boys in high glee. They ran up to me and said, "Come along; it's all arranged; we've got the keys of the boat-house, and we'll have a row by ourselves."

"But you mayn't," I said.

"Of course we may; don't you see we've got the keys?"

They were big strong boys, accustomed to rowing and managing a boat. I supposed that they were now allowed to go out alone, or how could

they have got the boat-house keys? It was a splendid autumn afternoon. The dead leaves floated by on the river, and yellow faded horse-chestnut-trees drooped over heavily. The river was rather swollen with the recent rains. We should not have many more such fine days; and as the Martins were allowed, I thought it would be nice to get in with Pet, and then be put out a little way down the river and run home.

“Ought’nt we to ask leave?” said Pet, looking longingly at the boat as the boys unchained her, and slid her out of the boat-house alongside of the shore.

“Oh!” I said, “we needn’t go, you know, for a regular row; only just a little way down the river, then we can be put out.”

“Come along in if you’re coming,” cried Harry, holding on to the bank for us to get in.

“I say Harry,” I said, with one parting qualm of conscience, “are you sure it’s all right?”

“Of course it’s all right. Haven’t I got the keys? If you and Pet like to stay ashore, stay.

I only offer you a row. You can help, and Pet can sit at the stern and steer."

This was too much to resist (little I knew that Harry had stolen the keys). I took Pet by the hand, Harry helped her in; I jumped in, and we pushed out into the stream.

The river was swifter than it looked, and before we could get the oars in rest, we had already floated sideways some little way down the stream. It was capital fun. The two Martins each took an oar; I sat at the stern and showed Pet how to steer. "Pull the string the side you want the boat to go," I said, "that's the rule." A water-rat jumped out of the bank close to us and dived instantly. "Catch him!" shouted Harry, plunging a hooked stick under the water; but the rat was off,—and the boat spun merrily down the stream.

Presently we saw a lovely king-fisher shoot out of a low bush. He flashed for a moment a bright emerald green in the light, like a big humming-bird, and we saw him no more,—and the boat spun merrily down the stream.

There were lots of horse-chestnuts floating about, and we tried by leaning over to fish some up as we went. Then we came to a dead fish, then we came to a drowned kitten; and as we went the river began to widen, and against some low, marshy fields, jutting out into the water, stood a fine clump of tall bulrushes. "Pull the right," I said eagerly to Pet, and I got out my clasp-knife. "You shall have one, Pet," I said, "then you'll be the Queen, you know, and the bulrush will be your sceptre!" As we passed, I made a slash at one tall stem, the heavy black head drooped and fell almost into Pet's lap; and she gave a little cry of delight as I placed the noble emblem in her hand,—and the boat spun merrily down the stream.

Presently we saw a wooden bar floating right across the river. Beyond that the water was deeper and swifter, and a little further on great barges floated down to sea miles off from the neighbouring wharf. "We must not cross the bar," I said; "how shall we get back?" But Harry had already leaned over and pushed

the beam at its weakest point under water. "Now pull!" he cried to his brother, who was struggling alone with both oars. But the boat stuck fast on the top of the bar, and the current seemed to heave it up. "Sit still!" he cried, and in another moment he had seized one oar, and both boys pulling together, we slid over the bar,—and the boat spun merrily down the stream.

"What shall we do?" said Pet to me rather agitated; "they won't stop, and how shall we get back? And we shall be so late, and I'm afraid Mama will be angry. Do stop!" cried Pet.

"I say, you fellows, you ought to put us out; you said you would, you know."

"There's a place to land lower down," cried Harry. "We can't stop now, the current's too swift just here. Besides it's capital fun. You aren't afraid, are you?"

"No more afraid than you are, Master Harry, but Pet and I want to get back."

There was a very good place to land a little further on, and I fully expected them to pull up

and stop there, when to my surprise they passed it at full speed.

“Why didn’t you stop?” I shouted.

“Yes, why didn’t you stop?” said Pet, this time very much annoyed, and getting quite restless.

“We must stop them, Ben!”

But there was now nothing to be done but to sit still and wait for the next landing-place,—and the boat spun merrily down the stream.

A little way on, a line stretched right across the river; it was the chain on which a ferry-boat slid backwards and forwards. The chain was above the water, so that a boat could pass under it if the people in it just ducked their heads. We were coming at a great pace, the swollen river was at its swiftest as we rapidly neared the chain.

“Duck your heads!” cried Harry.

I saw poor little Pet’s eyes twinkle with suppressed mischief, but before I could speak we were at the chain. She suddenly stood up, and crying, “Now I’ll stop you!” she seized the chain with all her might. In a moment the boat was swept

from under her by the current, she was lifted into the air, and left hanging to the chain. In her terror and surprise she loosed her grasp, trying doubtless to clutch at the stern of the receding



Almost gone!

boat. She sank instantly into the swollen water and disappeared,—and the boat spun merrily down the stream.

Pet would never have come up alive, but the moment she sank, Ponto, the big Newfoundland

dog, who had followed us along the bank all the way, dashed into the stream. He was a splendid water-dog, and I've known him fetch up a stone from the bottom of the river when told to plunge. The Martin boys backed the boat and rowed furiously up the stream. I stood clapping my hands and shouting wildly to Ponto; but the faithful brute, who had lived so much with us that I fairly believe he understood all we said, was a special friend of Pet's, and wanted no encouragement; he was under the water in no time. As we came up to the spot, he was dragging Pet by the clothes. He had got her, but he was evidently much distressed—his eyes glared wildly at me; his paws were struggling in poor Pet's drenched hair, but she did not feel them. I seized her, and with the help of Harry nearly upset the boat before we got her on board. She had those dreadful black rims round her eyes, and her lips were violet; her cheeks were ashen pale. We all thought she was dead. There was no time for much reflection. We moored the boat to the

ferry. A man was passing; he ran up. We got him to lift Pet out, wrap her in his coat, and rush to the nearest cottage with her, whilst one Martin boy rushed off for a doctor; the other went to Pet's house, and I stayed with my poor little friend, for I could not be prevailed upon to leave her.

When the doctor came Pet's consciousness had partly returned. She was shivering and shuddering all over in a dreadful way. Her teeth were chattering, and I was dreadfully alarmed; but the doctor seemed hopeful. We wrapt her up very warm, and gave her hot drinks; and before evening the Ainslies' carriage came down nicely warmed, and Pet was taken home.

That night when I went to bed my thoughts were not cheerful. I had been partly to blame for this accident, and though no one reproached me, I bitterly reproached myself.

I really believed the Martin boys had got leave, and could manage the boat. They assured me that they were in the habit of rowing constantly

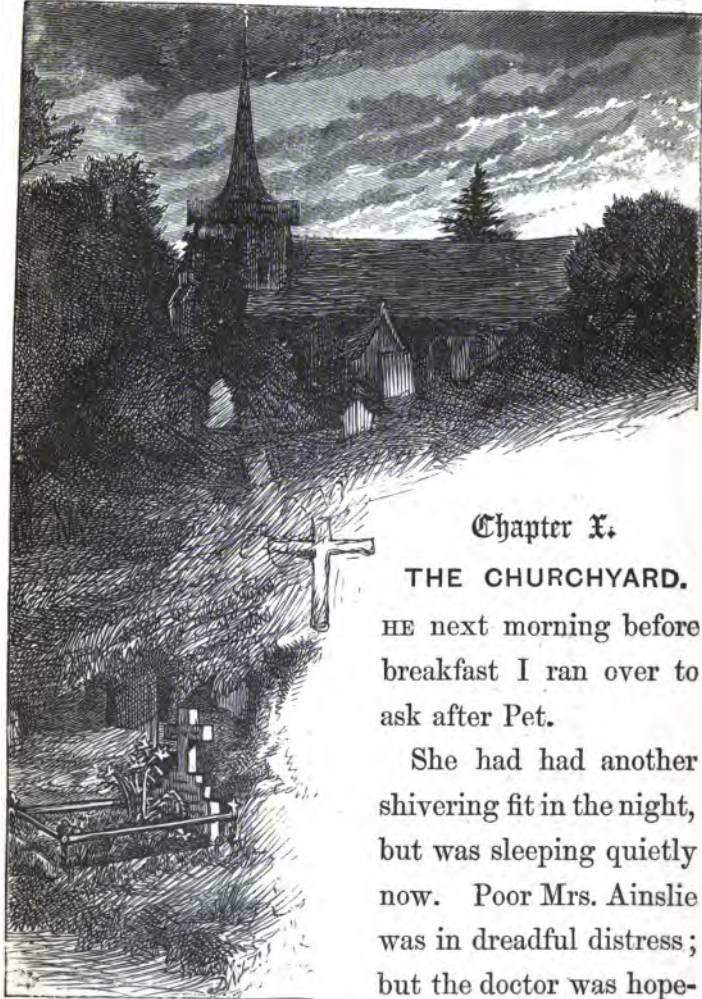
by themselves, which I found out afterwards was not true. Then no one had really given them leave on that day. They had stolen the keys and deceived us. I was tempted into the boat on the full understanding that we were to be put out only a little further down the river. They had deceived us again; they either could not or would not stop the boat. Then who could have dreamed that dear thoughtless Pet would have stood up and caught the chain.

I lay awake crying to myself, and trying to hide my sobs from Mabel, who was sleeping in the next room. I went over the accident again and again, trying to decide exactly how much I was to blame, and how much the Martin boys were to blame. I made up my mind that they were most to blame, as indeed they were; and whilst I was still thinking and thinking and wondering how Pet would be on the morrow, I fell fast asleep; but in my sleep I seemed to hear a voice speaking the same words over and over again. At first I could not distinguish what they were. The voice

seemed to come from a long way off. It grew louder and louder, and just as I thought I was going to make out the sense of it, died away. Each time, however, it came it continued to get louder and louder, till at last it came with a great shout in my ear, which woke me—it said—

“Ben, remember the river!”





Chapter I.

THE CHURCHYARD.

THE next morning before breakfast I ran over to ask after Pet.

She had had another shivering fit in the night, but was sleeping quietly now. Poor Mrs. Ainslie was in dreadful distress; but the doctor was hope-

ful. They were all very kind to me, and did not seem to think that I was much to blame, which was a great comfort to me.

The first thing Pet said when she woke up was, "Where's Ben?"

In the afternoon we went over again to inquire after her, and as she had repeatedly asked to see me, I was allowed to go up to her for a very few minutes. She was in Mrs. Ainslie's room, lying flat down—very weak but without pain.

"Oh! Ben," she said, "I was very nearly drowned. Ponto saved me. I want to see Ponto."

"Shall I bring him up, he's in the yard," I said.

"They won't let him come up. I may see him to-morrow. I'm to be kept very quiet." Then she seemed too weak to go on. Presently she turned a little on her pillow and put out her hand, which I took, and she said with a deep sigh, "Oh! Ben, I am so glad you're come. I wish you could stay."

"They won't let me stay. You'll soon get well, you know; then you can come out as usual."

"Do you think I shall soon get well? Do they

say I shall?" she said rather eagerly; and then her strength seemed to fail her, and she shut her eyes, and Mrs. Ainslie came in and beckoned me away.

I could think of nothing but Pet now, and she begged so hard to see me that I was allowed to go in for a short time every day. There was one other person besides her own papa and mamma whom Pet was allowed to see, and that was Miss Robin. She kept asking, "Is Miss Robin coming to-day? Do tell her to come and see me. Dear Miss Robin."

Pet's affection for the nice, kind governess had been growing ever since her interesting conversation with her in the garden. When she did not come, the patient grew restless and seemed to pine for her. Towards evening Miss Robin generally came in for half an hour, and sat with her; and before she went she used to say a little prayer, and after this Pet seemed always quieter; and she would then fall asleep pretty soundly for some hours.

She certainly had been getting better, but on the fourth or fifth day when I came in she said,

“Ben, -I want to tell you something! They think I am getting better; and I don’t feel so weak; but I’ve got such pains in all my joints. I don’t like to tell them about it. They think I am getting better, you know, and it would disappoint them; and perhaps I am, but—Oh, dear!” and she tried to move herself and was stopped by the pain. “I think I’m worse to-day.”

“You must tell them,” I said anxiously. “The doctor will be here presently, and he will know what to do. He might take the pains away if he only knew.”

Whilst I was there the doctor was announced. I could see by his face, the instant he saw Pet, he suspected something wrong; and after feeling her pulse, he said,

“You’ve got some pain, haven’t you, my dear?”

“Yes,” said Pet hesitatingly; for she saw it was of no use to hide it from the doctor.

“Where?” said he, kindly stroking her forehead, and parting her thick hair.

“In my legs and arms.”

“The joints, I suppose. And when you turn or move it hurts,” and taking her arm he raised it very gently, and she gave a little start of pain.

“Just so,” he said quietly.

The fact was rheumatic fever was setting in, and poor Pet’s sufferings, instead of being nearly ended, had only just begun.

The next two days were dreadful days. I was still allowed to see her; but the instant I came in, I could see the pain she was in. She could not bear to be touched.

“Don’t make such a noise, Ben,” she said peevishly.

I had come in quite softly.

“Don’t! Don’t!” she cried when I touched her hand.

I kissed her in great distress; but she turned away as if stung, and gave a little shudder of pain.

“You hurt me so!” she said almost bitterly; quite unlike herself. She was dreadfully irritable.

“Oh! Pet,” I said; “what can I do? What can I do? I’m so sorry. You know I didn’t mean to hurt you. I won’t touch you again.”

“Ben, I can’t help it,” she said, the tears coming into her eyes. “I’m dreadfully cross, I know. I can’t bear anything. I’m all over in pain. You won’t mind, dear old Ben, will you? I’m not really cross with you.”

She always called me dear old Ben when she meant to be very affectionate.

I was so miserable at not being able to help her. I had brought her some of her favourite lemon-drops. She tried to eat one, but she said it tasted nasty. I had got her a nice white camelia, and put it in a glass of water by her bedside. She looked at it for a moment, and then turned away with a little moan, and soon afterwards I left her.

For two days after that I was not allowed to see her. She was to be kept quite quiet; at the end

of about a week she changed for the better. I met Miss Robin coming away from the house.

“Well!” she said in her cheerful way, “dear Pet is better. I think you might see her tomorrow; she gave me a little message for you.”

“What is it?” I said, “and thanks, Miss Robin. I am so glad she is better.”

“You know, dear boy, her rheumatic fever makes her very irritable, and she seems cross to the people about her sometimes, but she can’t help that; it’s part of the fever. And she made me promise to tell you that when you last came to see her and brought her a camelia, she did not mean to be cross; and it was very kind of you to bring her the lemon-drops, only she couldn’t eat them, and she’s better now and would like very much to see you.”

I ran into the Ainslies’ house and asked if I might see Pet. In another moment I was at her bedside, she was sitting up. I could not help noticing a great change in her bright sunny little face; she looked quite twelve years old; she had

aged suddenly ; she smiled faintly as I came in, and said,

“ Take care, Ben ; don’t squeeze my hand,” so I just touched it very softly and said,

“ You’re better, ain’t you, Pet ? ”

“ I’ve been very ill since I saw you, and Miss Robin’s been very kind. She’s sat up with me at night and said such nice prayers ; they thought I was dying, Ben, and the clergyman’s been here. Ben, do you think I’ve done much that’s wrong ? ”

“ I don’t think you ever do anything wrong, Pet,” I said.

“ Well, but I must ; the clergyman said of course I had done wrong, and that I ought to be sorry, and ask God to forgive me, so I tried to think what I had done wrong. Perhaps, at lesson time, you know, when Miss Sparks taught us both we used to run away and not be found, and pretend not to hear when they called us.”

“ That was my fault,” I said.

“ Yes, but the clergyman said we ought not to lay the blame on others, but think what we had

done wrong ourselves. Then he asked me if I loved every one? I said 'No!' Because you know, Ben, I don't exactly love Mabel, because you know she always makes mischief, and she doesn't care for me a bit; and then there's Amy Marsden. You know I don't hate anybody, Ben; I don't want to hurt them. I should not like any of them to be as ill as I am, or suffer much pain, but I like people best that are kind to me, and that love me. Of course, I love Papa and Mama and you Ben, and Miss Robin, and I couldn't say all that to the clergyman, because I didn't know him well, you know. We used to see him in church, but he hardly ever came to see us; and then of course, you know, he didn't care really about us children, like Miss Robin—she loves the children. The other day, you know, Ben, she went up into her room and cried because Dicky told her a wicked lie, and had to be severely punished; when Dicky found this out, he rushed up to her and kissed her all over, and cried and said he didn't mind being punished so much because he had been a bad boy, but he

would never tell another lie ; and she smiled and almost cried again, and kissed him and said, God would make him a good boy. And oh ! Ben, you don't know what she's been to me," and here Pet looked older and graver than ever. " I don't think I could have lived through some of those awful nights. Hour after hour she was sitting there, with her sweet smile ready to comfort me, when every one was asleep in the middle of the night. One night, do you know, Ben, when I was worse than usual, she was sitting by me, and at last, I suppose she was very, very tired, she laid her head down close to mine on my pillow, and whispered a little prayer, when I couldn't bear even her voice out loud. I think she was crying a little too, but I was too weak to notice much ; she had tried everything, and nothing seemed to do me any good. I'm afraid I had been dreadfully irritable, but I can't remember, and she was quite worn out, and at last we both went to sleep together. After some hours I woke up so refreshed, without disturbing her ; she hadn't undressed. She was

half in her chair leaning on my bed, with her head on my pillow, and I was so glad she was asleep and so close to me, so I lay very still till it grew quite light; that was yesterday morning you know, Ben. I kept thinking of what the clergyman had said; he was very nice and kind you know, but he didn't understand me, so I determined to ask Miss Robin when she woke to explain to him that I was very sorry for all my sins, and that I didn't hate anybody, and she promised she would; that was the best way, wasn't it, Ben?"

In this way Pet ran on, occasionally interrupted by me, but getting quite interested in what she said; which was a good sign, as she had for some days been quite unable to fix her attention at all. She certainly was much better and in much less pain. How could I be prepared for what was to follow on the morrow. Every one was hopeful, there seemed such a change for the better; and Pet's mamma was quite angry with the doctor when he came in and said, "Better—yes, better," in a doubtful sort of way; and after feeling her pulse added,

with anything but a cheerful look, "Wait and see how she is to-morrow."

To-morrow it was arranged we were to have Ponto up again. Pet was very faithful to her friends; she was always wanting to have Ponto up when she had her dinner, and used to feed him with nice scraps. He used to sit on the floor by her bedside with his two big paws up on the counterpane, looking at Pet, wagging his tail, and with all sorts of friendly expressions in his dear old face. He and Pet perfectly understood each other; they had long conversations together, and highly valued each other's society.

I have not in these two last chapters said much about Mabel or Rob, or the Martins, or the other children, not because they were not all as kind and attentive as could be to Pet (all except Amy Marsden, who did not seem to care much), but because Pet occupied all my thoughts, and the events of those last few weeks entirely centred upon her, so that to me no one else in our neighbourhood seemed of much consequence.

The next morning I rushed into the Ainslies' yard to get Ponto unchained and take him up with me, when Rob met me with a very grave and anxious face.

"She's worse," he said, "she's had a bad night; they've sent for the doctor."

I was just allowed to go up with Rob for a minute. Pet was propped up in bed, her face was changed and anxious and worn; her breathing seemed irregular and at times difficult.

"I'm worse, Ben. I can't lie down; I've got a pain here," and she put her hand to her heart, and seemed as if she could not speak. The doctor came; we soon heard that heart disease had set in. I was not allowed to stop. I did not see her the next day, and the day after that was the last time I ever saw my poor Pet alive.

Miss Robin called in upon us that evening; she told us that the doctor gave very small hopes of Pet. She was going over that night to sit up with her, and she hardly left her from that time until her death.

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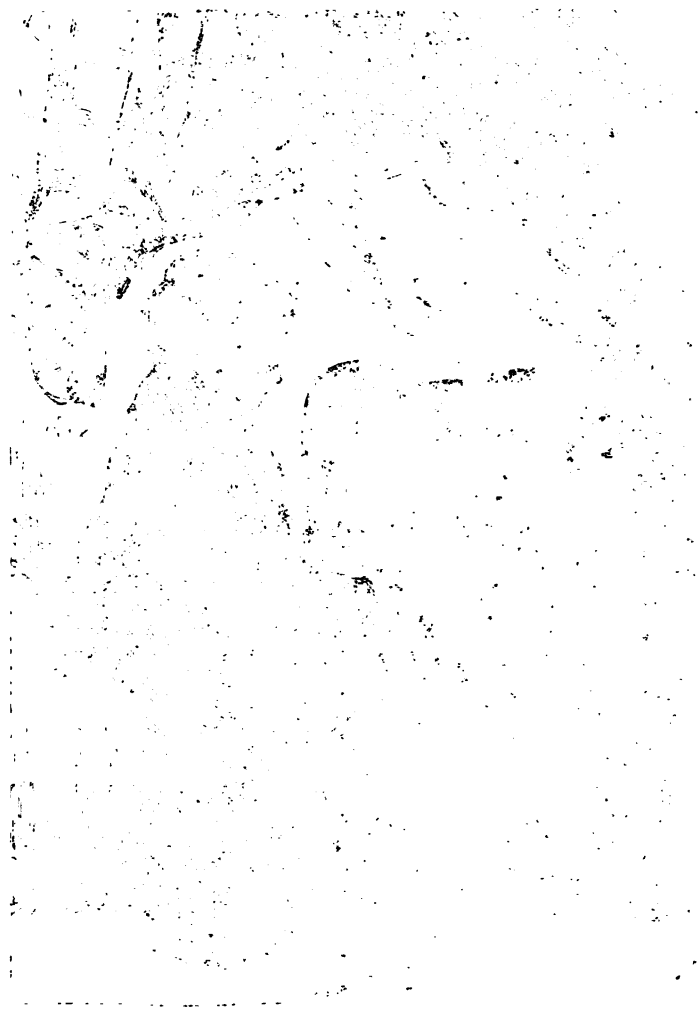


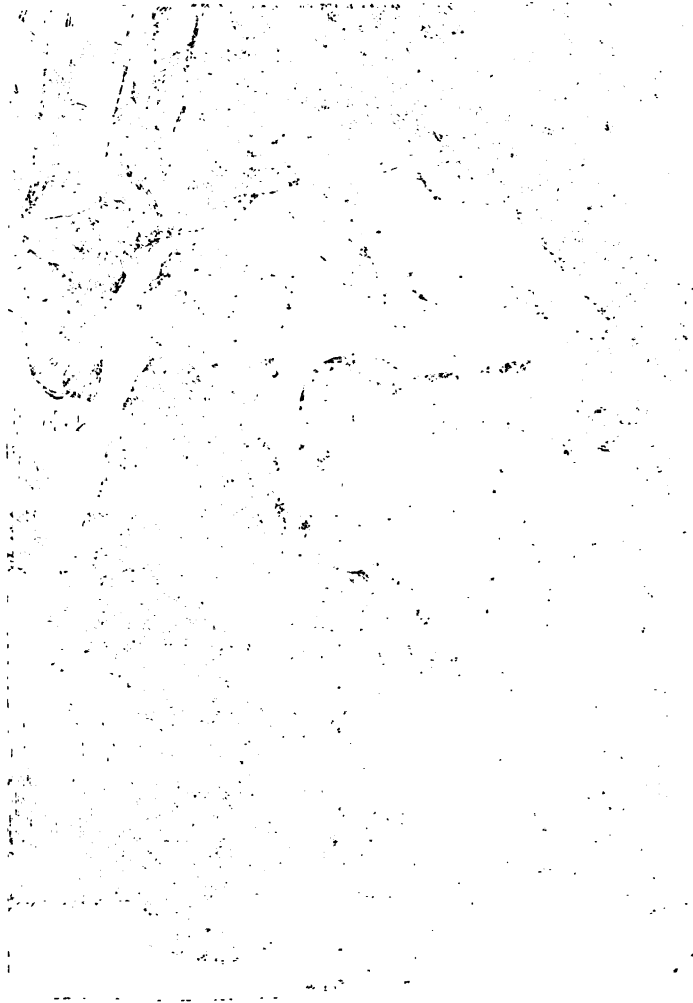
Figure 1

It was Wednesday morning that Pet was pronounced in a critical state. At first they thought that by keeping her very quiet, they might lessen her sufferings ; but when Pet fretted to see me, the doctor said it might do her as much harm as good to cross her, and that it did not much matter, so on Friday afternoon, about five o'clock, I was sent for.

There was a bright fire blazing in her bedroom. I entered as softly as I could ; all the blinds were down—it was one of those cold cheerless autumn afternoons, but there was a large lamp with a green shade on the table close to Pet's bedside, and everything was as warm and comfortable as could be.

When I went up and sat down by Pet, she hardly moved her eyes ; she was propped up just as I had seen her before, all her thick hair was gathered off her forehead and tied in a bunch behind her.

I was quite shocked to see her so changed. She beckoned me to come quite close, so I sat up on the bed by her side ; she could only speak in a sort of



It was Dr. Looby's opinion that Pet was pronounced in a critical state. At first they thought that by keeping her very quiet, they might lessen her sufferings; but when Pet fretted to see me, the doctor said it might do her no more harm as going to cross her, and that it did not much matter, so on the following afternoon, about five o'clock, I was summoned.

I found a bright fire blazing in her bedroom. I looked as softly as I could; all the blinds were drawn, and it was one of those cold cheery autumn afternoons, but there was a large lamp with a green shade on a table close to Pet's bedside, and everything was as warm and comfortable as could be.

When I went up and saw how my Pet, she had fully moved her eyes; she was propped up just as I had seen her before, and her thick hair was pulled out by the forehead and tied in a bun behind her.

I was quite shocked to see her so changed. She had never done so well since she was laid out, so I sat up on the table by her side, but she could only speak in a sort of



I shall never marry you now, Ben !

whisper, and I put my head close to hers, she seemed to rouse herself by an effort.

“Ben,” she said, “put your arm round me as you used to do, you know, and hold me up.”

So I put my arm round her little waist.

“Don’t press me, that’s my heart, it’s all wrong, Ben; there, that’s comfortable.”

“Pet, you’ll get well, dear, won’t you?” I said, struggling to keep down my tears, for I had a feeling that it was all over with my darling.

“No, Ben, I shall never get well. I’m not afraid to die, Ben, now, as I used to be. Dear Miss Robin read me a verse last night that has made me quite happy to die—“Suffer the little children . . .” She could not go on; the pain at her heart stopped her short. “Jesus Christ says that, Ben. I feel—I feel—” and she stopped again and seemed to get very drowsy. She closed her eyes and I saw her lips were moving. I think she was trying to say some little prayer; presently, she looked at me with quite a bright happy face, then it changed and grew sad.

“Kiss me, Ben,” she said, and I kissed her tenderly, but on her forehead.

“No!” she said, shaking her head, and looking very earnest. “On my lips, kiss me on my lips.” So I kissed her again on her lips. “You mustn’t cry, Ben. You know I shall never marry you now, Ben, but perhaps—Miss Robin says—Oh, dear! Hold me, Ben—not tight, dear Ben. I do love you so much.”

She never spoke to me again; she grew drowsy and seemed quite lost, and sank into one of those swoons from which she was only roused by the pain in her heart. I couldn’t control my tears any longer. Mrs. Ainslie came up and kissed us both, and propped up Pet a little higher; then the doctor came in and I went out of the room sobbing as if my heart would break.

That night, about ten o’clock, Pet died. We heard nothing about it till next morning, and then Miss Robin came over to us with her eyes very red, for she had been crying bitterly, and told us all about it. It seems that our dear Pet had remained

insensible for some hours, and then she had suddenly turned, opened her eyes wide, with a smile that seemed to light up her whole face, and gasped out, "There!" looking fixedly before and trying to point; she could say no more, but fell back and died almost immediately. Miss Robin said she was quite certain she was seeing some beautiful vision.

And so my little child-love was taken away from us. When Miss Robin had gone I went out into the garden by myself. There was not a place that did not seem full of Pet; the arbour we had sat so often in together, the walk leading down to the pond, the withered waterlily leaves were still clinging about the banks; the haystack in the orchard was again piled up high, and the old autumn nests that had been Pet's delight in the merry spring time, were black and empty in the naked hedges. Every unkind word I had ever said to my Pet came back to me then, and every gentle look and bright smile of hers too. "Pet! Pet!" I cried, and I half believed that she would answer me and come running round some corner. It was hard to realize

that she would never speak or smile again. No bright little figure stood in the gateway. I was terribly alone. I turned, not caring for my life, not knowing where to go or what to do, too sad at last even to cry. The orchard was wet and cold, and the bitter wind swept the dead leaves from the trees.

* * * * *

Next spring, when the violets began to blow, there was one little grave in a sheltered nook of our pretty churchyard, more thickly covered with those sweet flowers than the rest. Whenever I went by, I was in the habit of gathering a bunch to take home. Several who loved Pet used to have these little bunches of violets in their rooms. I always had some in mine—we used to call them Pet's flowers.

Whenever I went in the direction of the churchyard, if Ponto was loose and saw me, he would come; poor Ponto, who had loved our Pet too, and had laboured so nobly to save her and yet in vain. When I got to the grave, Ponto lay down flat with

his nose between his paws, like a watcher, and waited quietly till I had done gathering the violets.

Miss Robin came there too sometimes, and the children who had known Pet best, and remembered how dear and lovable a child she was, all through the summer hung fresh flowers upon the little marble cross, whose shadow fell upon her grave. On the cross was written,

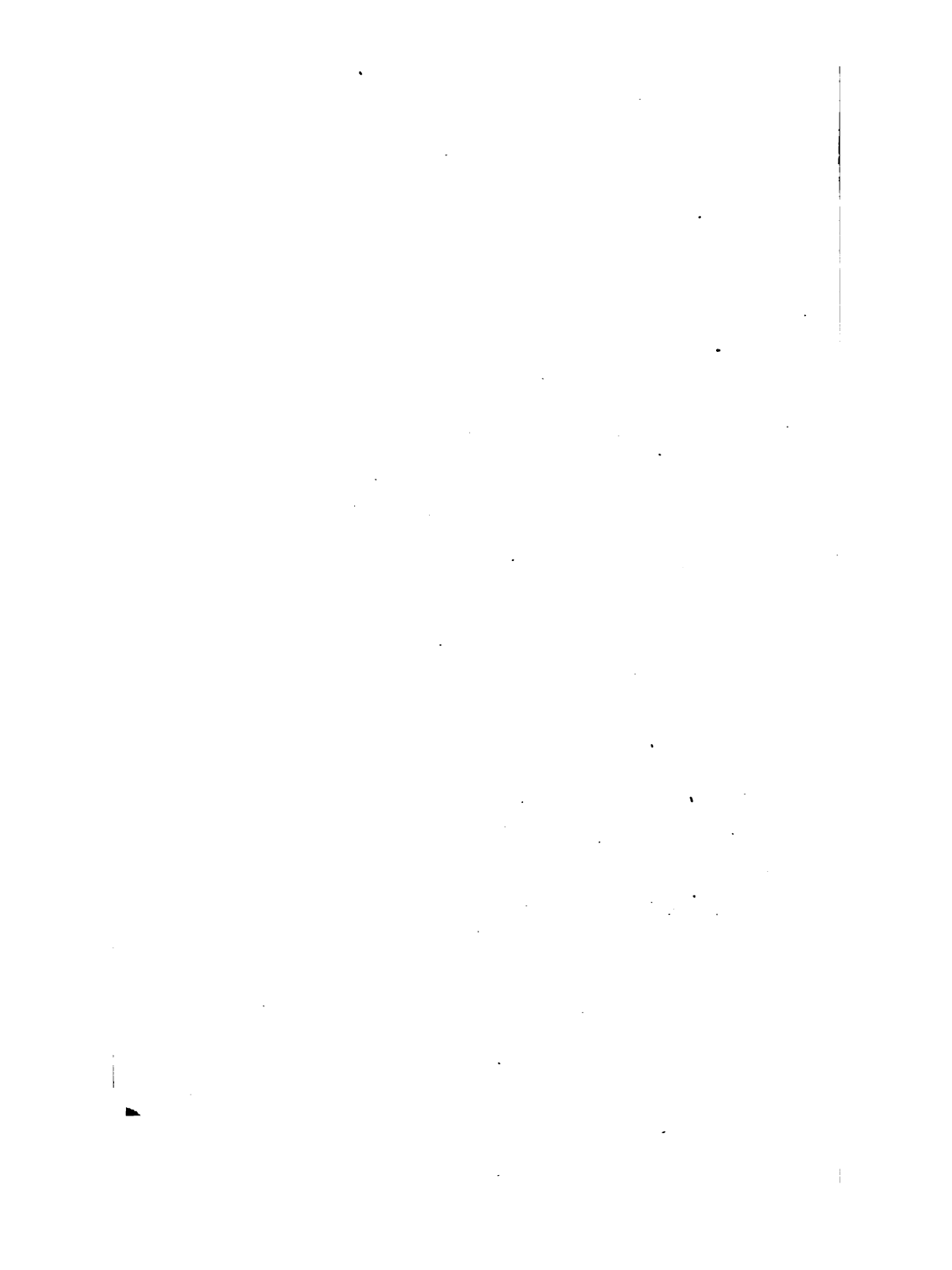


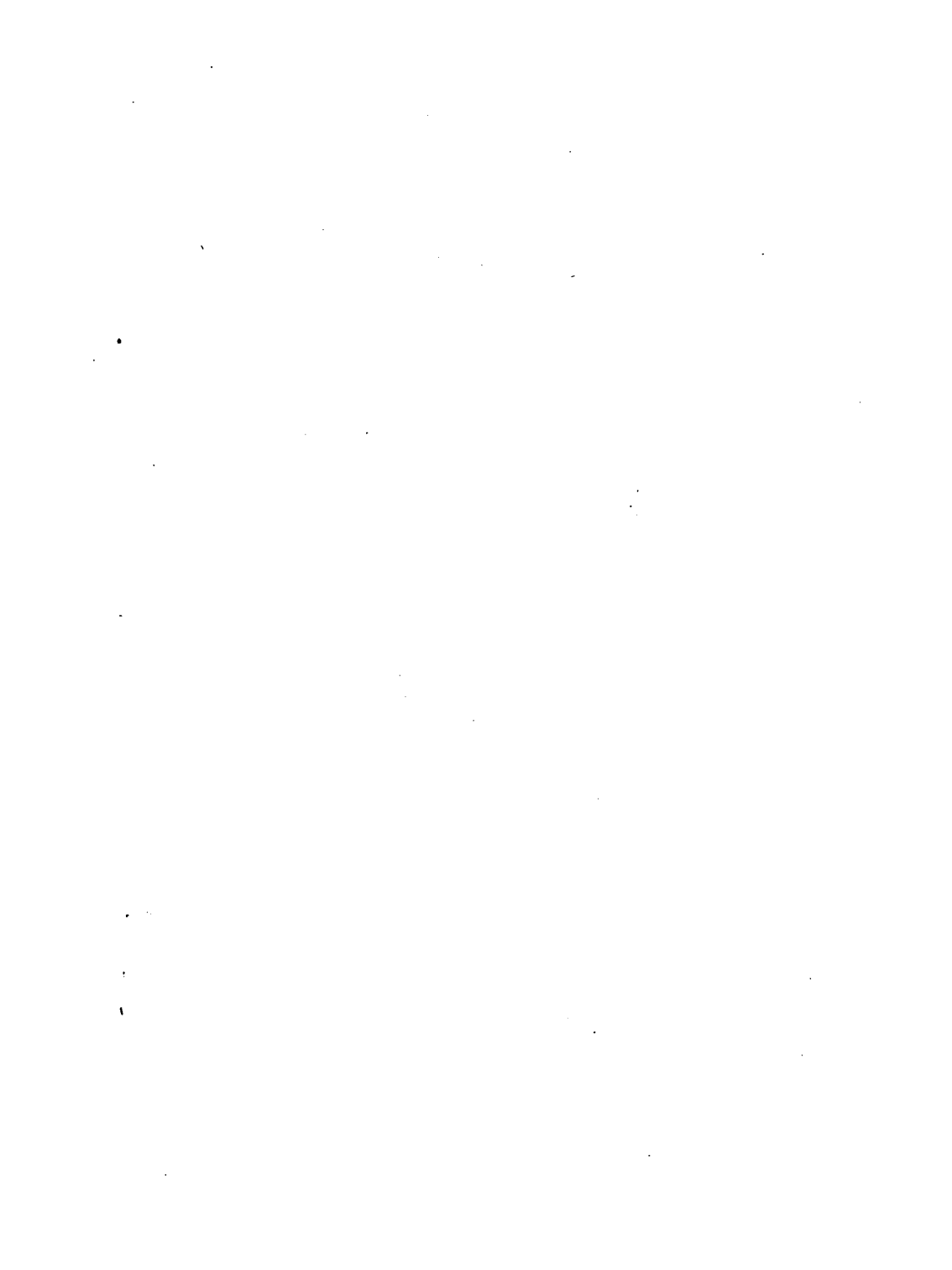
Sacred to the Memory of
ETHEL AINSLIE,
Aged 11 years and 1 month.
Born, 18—. Died, 18—.

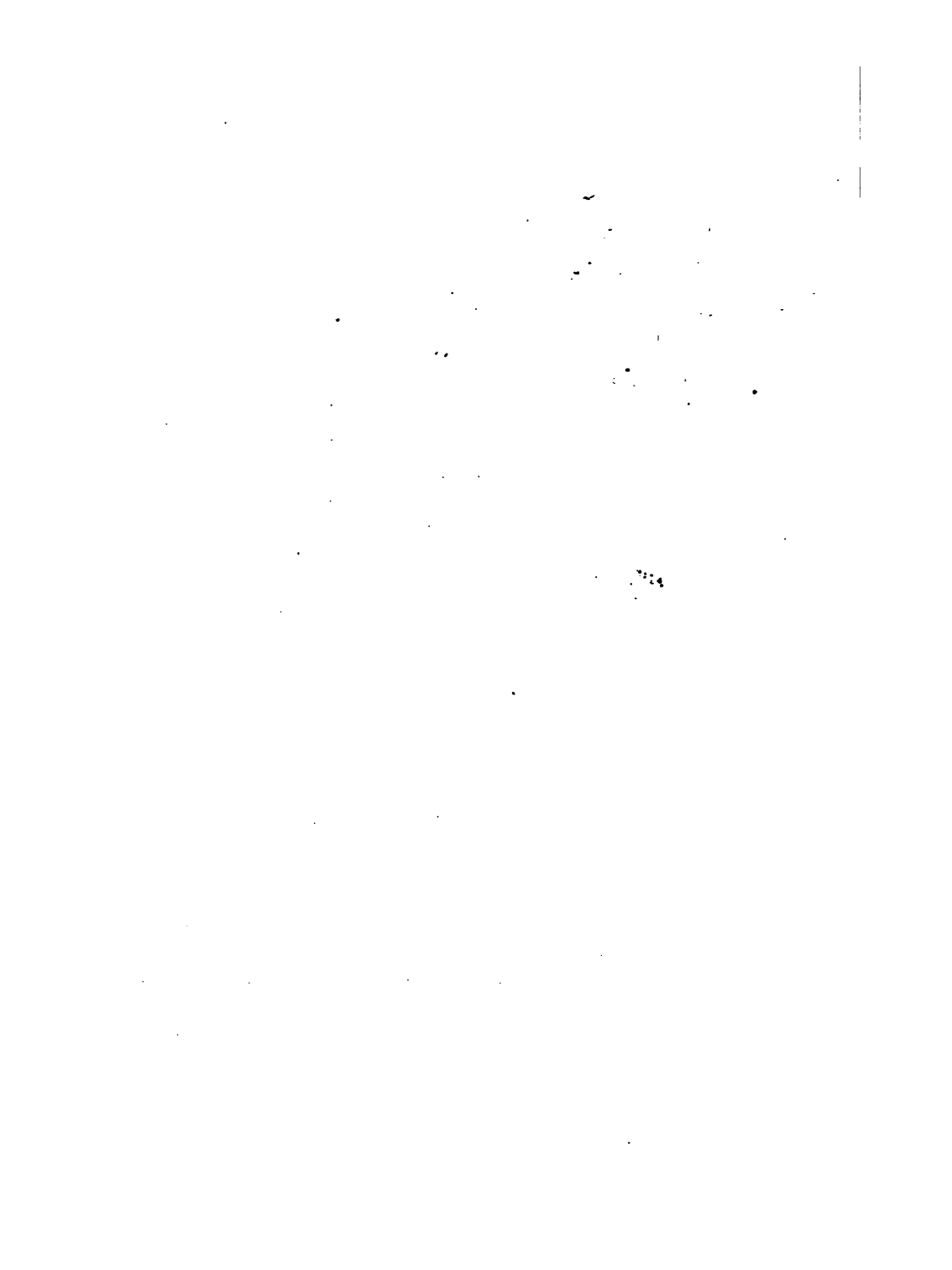
And the only sentence beside was the one which had given her so much comfort at the last.

“Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven.”









MAY 29 1888
JUN 19 1888

MAR 13 1888

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